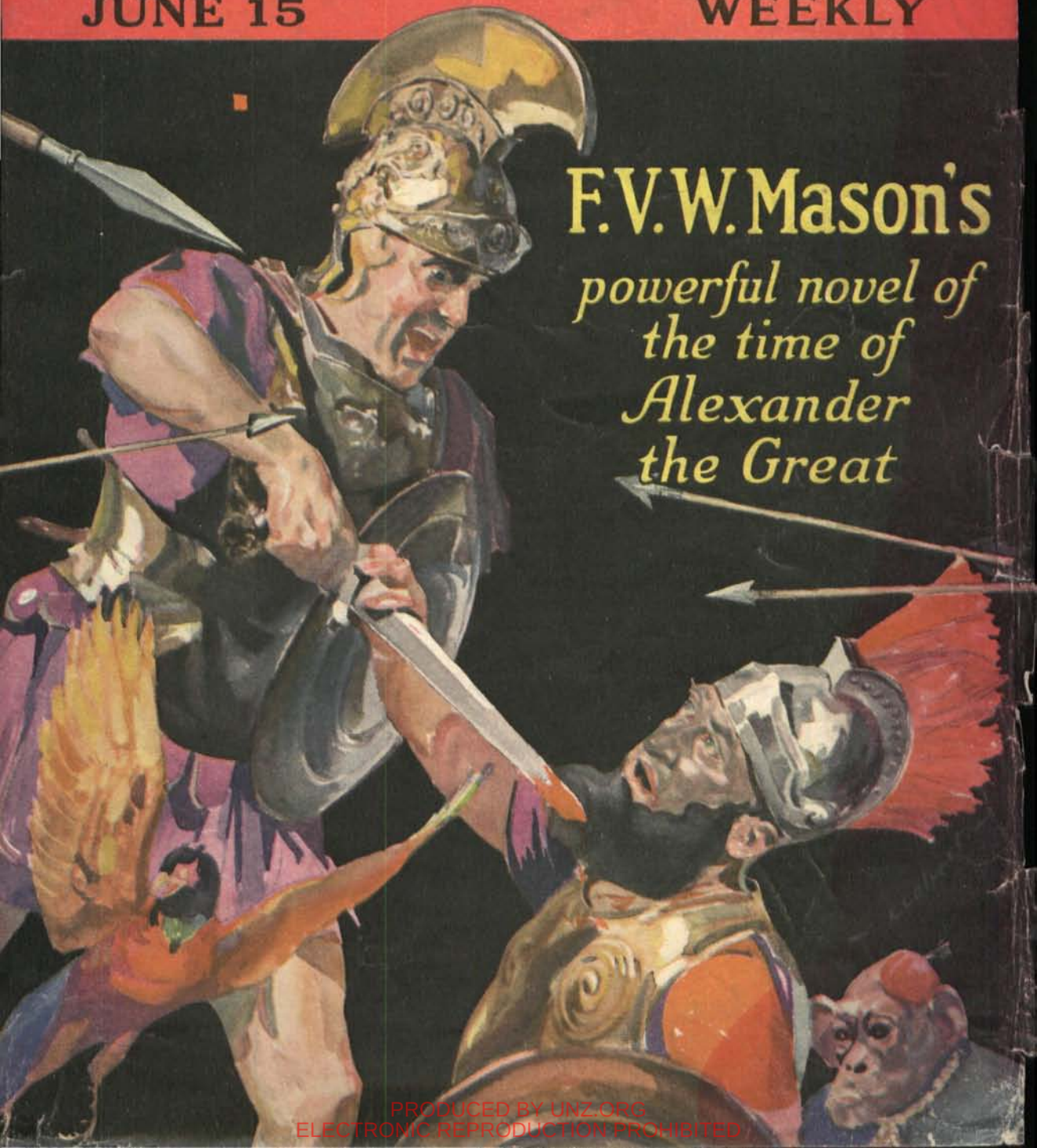
10¢

J. Allan Dunn—Ared White

ARGOSY

NRA CODE

JUNE 15 WEEKLY



F. V. W. Mason's

powerful novel of the time of Alexander the Great

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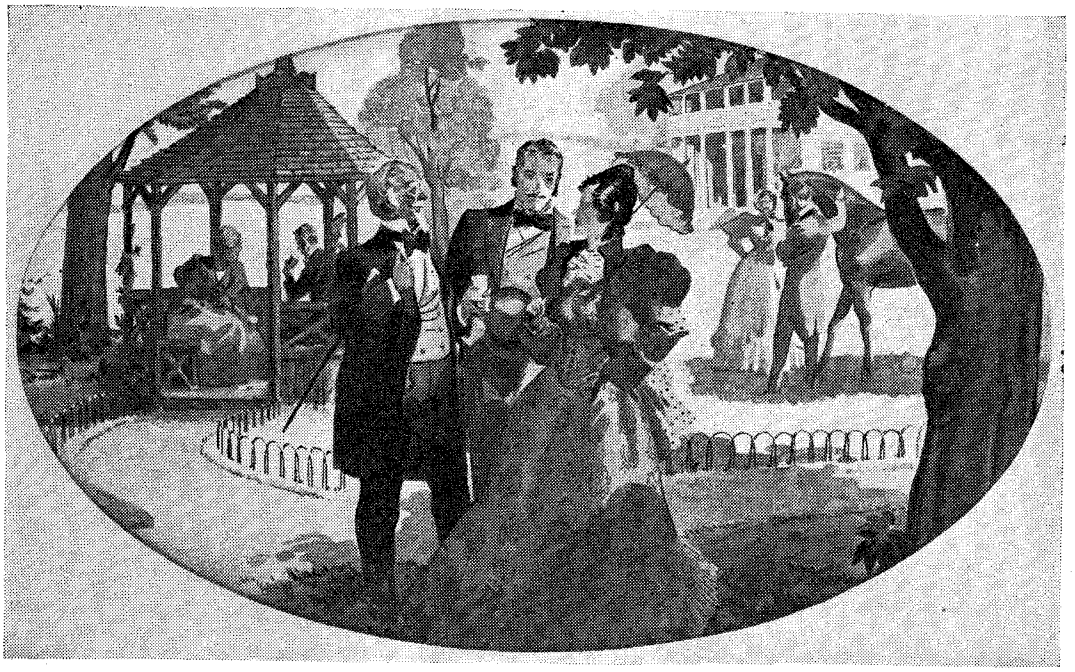
To quality folk throughout Kentucky that name Crab Orchard stood for good food and good whiskey



BUBBLING out of the limestone hills, down in the heart of the Blue Grass country, a sparkling spring first drew people to Crab Orchard.

They came to "take the waters," and, because they knew good living and enjoyed it, the local hotel strove to make their visit memorable with such tempting Southern delicacies as barbecued squirrel, delectable pohickory, or roast 'possum and candied yams.

And there was something else—a straight bourbon whiskey, rich and ruddy, of a flavor which even the flower of old-time Kentucky's gentility praised.

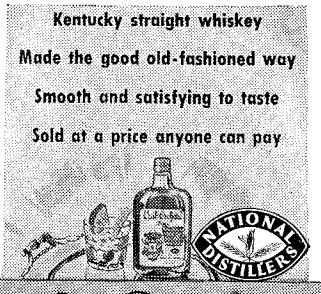
To find this particular whiskey, the Crab Orchard Springs Hotel had searched far and wide, and finally—from a little distillery up Louisville way—had a private supply shipped in by the barrel. It wasn't a widely famous whiskey then. It wasn't even bottled or labeled. It was only in later years that it came to be known as Crab Orchard whiskey.

The name Crab Orchard might never have leaped to nation-wide favor, except for one thing.

It stood for a whiskey which was not only rich and mellow—not only made in the good old-fashioned way, straight as a string, *but also economical.*

And suddenly, after repeal, all America wanted such a whiskey.

In a few brief weeks, the name and goodness of Crab Orchard whiskey was on a million tongues, and this one-time local favorite is *America's fastest-selling straight whiskey today.*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Made the good old-fashioned way
Smooth and satisfying to taste
Sold at a price anyone can pay
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A good guide to good whiskey

Crab Orchard

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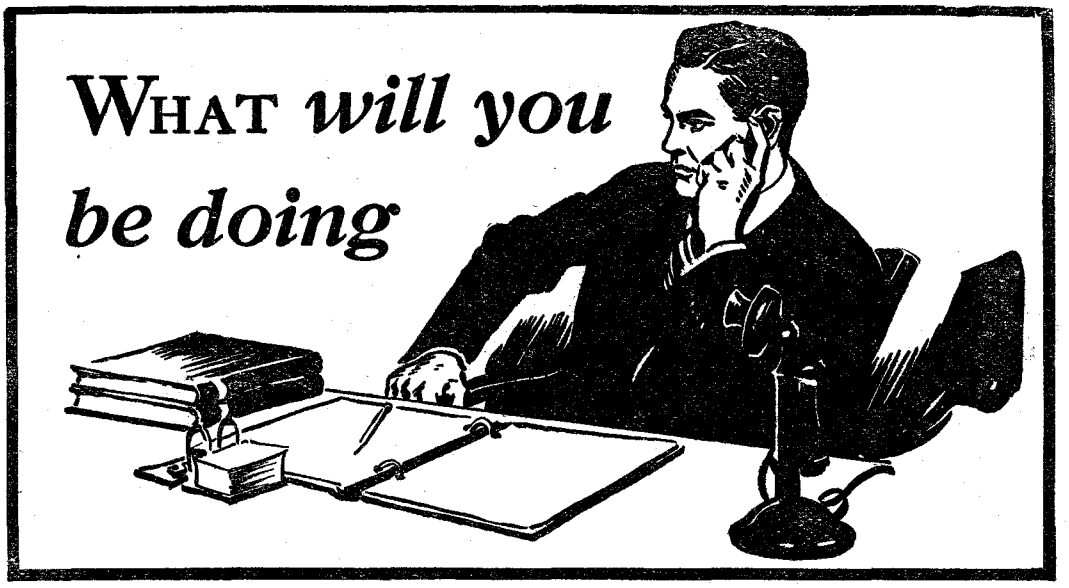

ONE YEAR *from today?*

THREE hundred and sixty-five days from now—what?

Will you still be struggling along in the same old job at the same old salary—worried about the future—never able to make both ends meet?

One year from today will you still be putting off your start toward success—thrilled with ambition one moment and then cold the next—delaying, waiting, fiddling away the precious hours that will never come again?

Don't do it, man—don't do it.

There is no greater tragedy in the world than that of a man who stays in the rut all his life, when with just a little effort he could advance.

Make up your mind today that you're going to train yourself to do some one thing well. Choose the work you like best in the list below, mark an X beside it, and without cost or obligation, at least get the full story of what the I.C.S. can do for you.

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ARGOSY

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Action Stories of Every Variety

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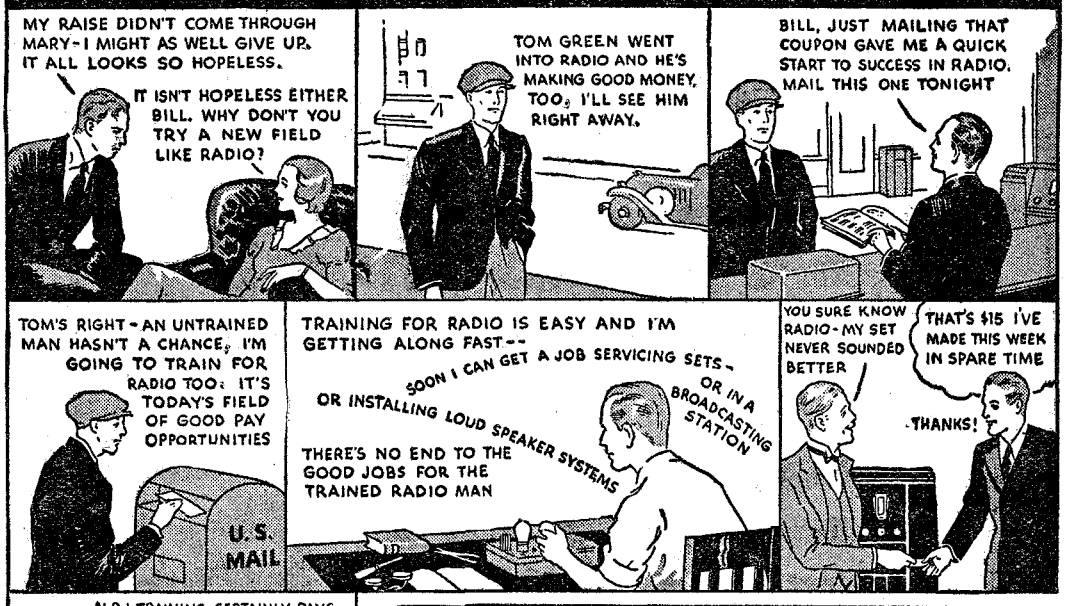
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!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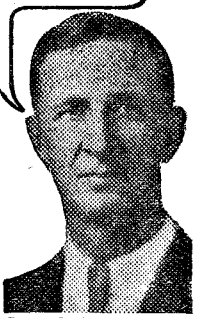
I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME
In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB



J. E. SMITH, President
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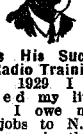

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DETECTIVE

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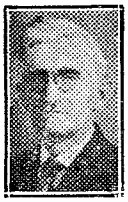
Prostate Sufferers



DR. W. D. SMITH
INVENTOR

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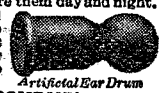

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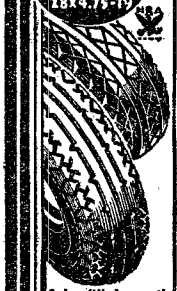

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29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15
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34x7	10.95	3.95
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32x4½	3.35	1.15
33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
30x5	3.65	1.25
33x5	3.75	1.45

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Lysander of Chios

By

F. V. W. MASON

Author of "Captain Long Knife," "The Barbarian," etc.

Lysander had thirty warriors; the Persians numbered millions—yet Lysander was going out to do battle with them

CHAPTER I.

GALLEY RACE.

A THIN flame bluely struggling for existence on the ruined altar flared higher when the old queen, from a delicate amphora, poured a little myrrh upon the heap of coals. Twisting like a serpent, a fragrant smelling flame mounted so suddenly that the whole scene was briefly revealed in soft tones of old gold. At the altar's foot a sheep, bound and decked with flowers for sacrifice, struggled suddenly and blatted. A young warrior standing beside the proud old woman spoke quickly.

"Quick, Cleon! Screen the altar

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with your cloak; or tomorrow we'll have a visit from the satrap's galleys!"

Cleon, handsome despite his battered and crestless helmet, promptly shielded the glare with a cloak which had seen its best years long before Mazaeus, Darius III's savage satrap, had come to ravage Chios from end to end with flame, sword, and salt.

"Speak, my son," impassively directed the old queen.

"Before Zeus the Savior, and Poseidon, greatest of his sons, I, Lysander, son of Philo Eacida, and his queen, Hippolyta, once Princess of Tarentum"—the speaker's strongly modeled head, all gilded by the dancing flames, inclined gravely towards the straight old woman whose fierce dark eyes alone successfully penetrated the gloom—"take solemn oath that I will not rest from warring on the hosts of Persia until I, the king, shall return, ready to restore the riches and the glory which once were Chios'!"

Hollowly his voice resounded among the heaped rubble and crumbling black walls of the ruined palace. Straight as any of the fire scarred but still lovely Ionic columns behind him, stood the young king, his deep-set eyes earnestly studying the heart of the sacrificial flame. Neither gold, silver, nor jewels glinted on his cuirass which, as any one could see, was very old, dented, and forged for a far smaller man than its present wearer.

No sound rose from some two hun-

Roaring with fury, Conon surged forward

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dred odd shaggy and furtive people kneeling amid the salt sown marble ruins of King Philo's palace. Their eyes were those of hunted creatures, and their hands, held clenched, rather than clasped before them, were gnarled from years of struggle for a meager living. Nearest the altar was ranged a double rank of deeply tanned men; mostly young, they were armed with a pathetic miscellany of old and obsolete weapons, but they were powerful in body and hard of feature.

Only the flower crowned victim moved as the king's deep voice continued. "Further do I swear not to rest or to indulge myself until the power of the Medes and Persians and their dog-descended vassals, the Phoenicians, lies crushed in the dust; until their palaces and cities have become a lair but for the scorpion, the lion, and the lizard!"

The oath concluded, the speaker turned to an emaciated old man.

"Read the omens, O reverend Hauruspex!"

He, crowned with cornflowers and ivy, quickly cut the ram's throat, and after catching its blood in a bowl, poured a little on the flames.

"Bring forward a torch," quavered the augur, then, by the yellow glare of a pine knot, he slit open the victim's abdomen and began to narrowly study the viscera—paying especial attention to the heart, lungs, and liver.

"O ye great gods, let the omens be favorable to thy poor people," the assembly muttered while the Hauruspex's reddened hands fumbled about the steaming entrails.

LYSANDER, meanwhile, dipped with a horn spoon into a little ivory box and cast a tiny measure of spikenard onto the fire. Then he raised both hands skywards and cried in a strong, low voice.

"Hear us, O great Zeus! Let the omens be favorable to our enterprise!" Then, very like a wail, so terribly earnest was it, a hymn of invocation arose from the shadowy multitude crouched amid scarred pillars and broken statues which even Persian fury could not entirely rob of their beauty.

"Hear us, Zeus!" cried the old queen. "Through the arm of my son let me be avenged for the husband and little children whom Mazaeus flung into his lion pit at Sardis. Be not displeased, O greatest of the gods, that these gifts upon your altar are poor and miserable." Momentarily the passionate thin voice broke, but she went on. "Time was, O radiant Son of Saturn, when fifty snow white bullocks would have spilt their blood before thine altars. Yea, as they did before Plataea and again on the eve of Samothrace. So remember, Zeus the Savior, and strengthen Lysander's arm in battle; also those of the young men of Chios! And now what word, O Hauruspex?"

His nearly toothless gums pink and shiny in the firelight, the priest raised a troubled face, blinking like a man suddenly roused from sleep.

"The omens are not bad—yet—yet at the same time they are not wholly propitious."

From the crowd arose a half sigh, half groan; but Lysander laughed.

"Then it seems the gods decree it is for us to shape our own destiny! What do you say, my people?"

"Let us sail!" Cleon snatched out his sword, thus evoking a ringing shout from the other young men. "We've waited too long as it is!"

Suddenly checking his enthusiasm, Lysander turned.

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"What do you think, mother?"

"I—I—" the thin lips quivered visibly. "I would have you wait—but, well, your noble father always said, 'When in doubt it is better to charge.' It was that way he helped smash the Persian fleet at Samothrace. So go with my blessing—last of my children."

One by one the wolfish peasants, broken nobles and impoverished merchants of the desolated island filed by the altar, each dropping some small offering before the battered block of marble. Now a worn gold ring was deposited, another would give but a handful of corn, a tiny child offered half a loaf of coarse black bread, and the old queen could present nothing more than a pair of terrified white doves.

Watching the scene from the background stood a one-eyed figure, grim as Ares himself. Completely armored from a Theban helmet which had once been gold trimmed to battered greaves of heavy bronze, the wandering mercenary looked on with folded arms. A pitying smile curved his slash of a mouth as he turned to his hairy shield bearer a pace to the right.

"Those fools would do better not to waste that food on the fire," he grumbled. "The gods alone know what we'll eat if the worm eaten galley we're going off in ever gets us to the mainland."

"True, Conon, my master," hastily agreed the peltast. "But these local fellows look pretty hardy and they're burning to get at the Persians."

"That's because they don't know 'em yet," muttered the leather featured Theban. "Enthusiasm's a good thing, but it's damned thin armor against the six foot arrows of old Darius' Indian bowmen, and it won't save 'em from a Phoenician galley if we're chased."

When the flame on the altar died into ruddy coals, the throng silently made its way down to that spacious harbor in which the swan prowed galleys of Egypt, the gaouls of Sidon, and even the triremes of far off and little known Carthage had once beached or had dropped their big stone anchors. Now wharfs, shipyards, and piers were rank with weeds and the windows of the gutted warehouses seemed like the eyes of so many gigantic skulls.

HAULED up on a pale stretch of sandy beach but a single galley now lay, and she, as Conon had said, was a sorry sight, a makeshift clumsily reconstructed from the waterlogged wreck of an Athenian galley, which had been lost years before near Cardamule on the eastern shore of Chios. The gear of the Persepone, as the salvaged galley had been named, was scant and in pitiable condition, and her hull so badly worm eaten that even Lysander wondered if his foot would not go through the bottom before she got well clear of the harbor.

Like a dark tide the people covered the beach, and farewells, inarticulate but infinitely eloquent, were exchanged.

Hippolyta, standing very straight, tried to smile as she said, "Well, son, it's been a long fifteen years since Chios has sent out an expedition, and I'm ashamed to have Philo's son leave for the wars like this; but it's the best we can do. Um, I remember the last time—that was before Mazaeus came—we'd twenty sound biremes and two thousand men to sail with your father—how proud I was! But don't misunderstand, I'm even prouder to see this one old galley go off. You know what

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it's meant to the island in sacrifice and self-denial."

Her deeply lined face softened. "Go, Lysander, and come back soon to help me rebuild the glory of Chios. I—I'm getting old, and I'd like to leave our kingdom as I found it. Go and make those damned painted Asiatics pay for all they've done to us. And remember to pay close attention to Conon's advice. He's experienced, and he'll warn you about Persian tricks. Oh, while I think of it, yesterday I spoke with a fisherman from Tenedos."

"Why should a fisherman from Tenedos come here?"

"I don't really know—wanted some water, I think. At any rate, it seems he touched at Naxos and"—she lowered her voice—"he said King Menander is very angry you weren't more backward in refusing the hand of his Kyria."

Laughing, Lysander shook his head. "By Eros, I'd be crazy to marry such a hoyden. Besides, I—"

"They say she's beautiful."

"Oh, I suppose so. She's good looking in a boyish sort of way. But you should have seen her last year at the chariot races on Naxos. She swaggered like a hoplite and her eyes were a sight too bold to suit me."

"Well, son, it appears you've no cause to worry any more—old Menander has betrothed his royal wench to Xenias—you know, he's that Corinthian prince old Conon was talking about the other day."

"It's just as well, mother. I've plenty else to worry about. What else did the fisherman from Tenedos talk about?"

"He said that Alexander, the new young King of Macedonia, is gathering an army to attack Darius, of all things! He must be weak in the head to even think of it. Sparta is waiting to knife him in the back, and the great king's hosts are like the sands of this beach—dig deeper and you only find more sand. Nevertheless, you might keep an eye on this crazy Macedonian; luck often favors the headstrong and reckless."

"Very well, mother. And now—" Very gently the young warrior took into his arms the silently suffering old queen and murmured a few tender words.

All about them on the dim and starlit beach similar farewells were taking place. At length Lysander turned and, without a word, caught hold of the woman's figure forming the galley's figurehead and with a subdued clank of his armor vaulted aboard. In equal silence the Theban wanderer, his peltast,* and the young men of Chios were clambering aboard, when a murmur sounded so loud along the beach that it rose above the soft *hiss-hiss* of wavelets.

"Fire! A fire! Look up there on Mt. Milo!"

Lysander, wheeling sharply, beheld a red pin point of light throbbing on a naked and not distant mountainside. Once, twice, and thrice it blinked—then once more three times.

"Persian ships! Fly!" some one yelled, and then a frightened babble arose. "Zeus help us!" "Abandon the galley!" "There are three ships out yonder!"

"Silence! Stop that chatter!" sharply warned the old queen. "You'll be heard on a still night like this! Quit the beach at once—everybody!"

* Peltast—a light armed warrior slave who, on the march, carried the shield and heavy armor of the hoplite, or heavy armed infantryman.

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"Stations!" quietly ordered Lysander. "Brisk now!"

WHILE oarsmen on the sternmost benches dug fifteen foot blades deep into the water, throwing their weight hard against the galley's rawhide oarlocks, the balance of the crew remained knee deep in the water to heave at the bow until, with the help of some old men and half grown boys, the galley began to slide over her rollers and to creep silently out into the star sprinkled harbor. Panting with their exertions, the waders now swung aboard.

Without a word being spoken, Lysander threw his weight on the galley's big double bladed steering oar, while at the same time Cleon, his lieutenant and best friend, caught up small gavels which, beaten on a sounding board, dictated the speed of the stroke. *Tock! Tock!* Discordantly, oars whined in ungreased leather locks, and soon the decrepit old galley was heading for the harbor's mouth.

Lysander threw only one glance over his shoulder; the beach was already of an unrelieved white, and the gaunt ruins of the city seemed more tragic and desolate than ever. High, hurrying clouds, he noticed, were beginning to eclipse great patches of stars.

"Raise the beat, Cleon. If those ships are a fleet of damned Phoenicians on their way to Samos or Miletus, we'll have to beat them to the end of the island."

"Right—but they seem to be steering towards Lesbos. Don't you think we'd better stand out to sea?"

"Keep as you're going. We'll soon see— What in Hades?" The warning beacon on Mt. Milo had suddenly flared higher and the Theban veteran swore loudly in his grizzled beard.

"Oh, the bloody fools! Until now the hook-noses yonder might have thought it a campfire; but will you look at the blasted bonfire! Even a thick skulled Egyptian would know something's afoot!"

That the Phoenicians had scented a quarry did not remain long in doubt; scarcely had the Persepone cleared the harbor than her bow lookout called, "Three triremes cruising northwards! Great Poseidon! They're close under the shore and not half a mile away! Raise the beat!"

"Ares' curse on the luck!" snarled Conon. "It is even too late for us to beach this tub and hide. They'd cut us off. Well, my lad, it seems we've no choice but to run for it!"

"It's just as well; I'd not turn back even if we could. Raise the beat, Cleon —twenty to the minute!"

Over the water came the ominous grind and swash of sweeps picking up the beat and, above the rhythmic splash of the Persepone's own oars, the uncannily still night conveyed the staccato *tock! tock!* of gavels, and the groans of toiling slaves.

Hastily the islanders unbuckled whatever pieces of armor they still wore and, naked to the waist, braced their feet and swung their powerful bodies in quickened beat which sent spray flying high in the lifeless air.

"Row harder! Those damned Phoenician dogs are still gaining!" Conon presently announced in a grim, matter-of-fact voice. "'Tis Pluto's own luck to cruise in a craft so confounded sluggish as this."

When her oars were swung still faster, the Persepone began to draw away from her pursuers; but, as the night wore on, fresh gangs of slaves must have been sent to the oars of one particularly swift trireme. She, leav-

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ing her slower fellows behind, began a dogged and an alarmingly efficient pursuit.

CONTINUALLY Lysander studied sea and sky; it now being obvious that the Persepone would be overtaken if the night did not grow black enough to permit an escape.

After turning the steering oar over to Conon, he thoughtfully made his way forward along a mast which lay flat between the double line of oarsmen and began to clear it for quick raising. The line of his jaw tightened, however, when he saw how flecks of saliva were flying from the contorted lips of some of the rowers. Not one of them but was bathed in sweat and with his muscles standing out in wales.

"We—gaining?" wheezed a bow oarsman. "I—I—can't hold out much longer."

"We're gaining fast." Lysander tried hard to make his lie sound convincing. "In a few minutes the wind will be stronger and then we'll lose them in the dark."

But when a half hour had dragged by and two of the rowers had fallen fainting onto the slimy bottom of the Persepone, the wind came from dead ahead, and the night was still light enough to reveal the Phoenician's dark silhouette coming up hand over hand. Snarling curses, Conon resumed the helmet he had discarded during his spell at the oars and pulled its hinged cheek pieces down over callouses formed by them along his cheek bones.

"Well, it looks like we'll have to fight," the Theban panted. "It seems that Hauruspex was right and that Zeus wasn't pleased with your sacrifice. You'd better tell your men to stop rowing and catch their breath. Besides, they'll need time to put on their armor."

Lysander glared furiously back at the pursuer, whose menacing, bronze-tipped ram was beginning to show in the rising sea. "Fight a Phoenician war galley with thirty men! No, we'll row until we drop and then take our chances."

Only his eyes betrayed the despair gnawing like a caustic acid at his brain.

In helpless fury he clung to the steering oar, frantically groping for some saving idea while he guided the heavy old galley among waves which were steadily rising. More and more spindrift kept flying over the Persepone's dangerously low sides, and a foot of water was sloshing about on the bilges. Like a badly stricken monster, the seventy foot craft commenced to roll and plunge.

When the outline of a wine keg met Lysander's eye, he called Conon to the steering oar, then, catching up a coil of rope, hurried forward. From the never cold bucket of charcoal there he kindled a lantern. Wet with spray, he then went aft again, all the time calling encouragements to his nearly exhausted crew. Here and there a man made a brave effort to rally his failing body, but three hours of fierce and unrelenting effort was spelling the Persepone's doom.

"In the name of all the gods, what foolishness is this?" The one eyed Theban's features glistened like bronze in the lantern's uncertain glow. "They'll be aboard us in twenty minutes! You must have gone crazy!"

"Keep her steady! I've thought up a scheme; it may fool those Tyrian dogs. Now listen—" Cupping his hands to make himself heard over the

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wailing wind, the islander outlined his idea, then, despite Conon's open contempt, hurried forward, stopping by each oarsman to explain his strategy.

MEANWHILE, aboard the Phoenician, dark skinned and thin faced men wrung spray from their beards and stared through the flying mist. When they saw how near was their quarry, they gave thanks to Baal and Astarte and rubbed their horny hands in satisfaction.

"Look! They're lighting lamps to arm by! That's the same as money in the mouth for you and me, Himilco." And indeed the restless waters reflected the plunging gleam of a lantern.

"By the white breast of Astarte, they *are* fools!" Himilco, captain of the trireme, joyously wrung water from his black beard and turned quickly to armored men waiting in the waist. "But for that we'd have lost them in this damned blackness. Ho! Gisco"—he slapped the captain of marines on his bronze clad shoulder—"inside of half an hour we'll have plenty of stout slaves aboard. Ishtar smite me if any weak men could last as long as those stubborn, pig-eating Greeks!"

"Aye, and Ibrahim says they're short of galley slaves at Mitylene. Fifty minae apiece they're fetching—Damn it, Nubo, use your whip!"

Promptly word was passed aft, whereupon Numidian slave drivers whirled their heavy lead-tipped whips until fettered oarsmen howled like trapped beasts as they made the triple bank of oars bend like reeds under their agonized energy. Like a cruelly spurred horse the trireme surged after the fleeing galley marked by that single treacherous lantern.

LYSANDER

Again and again the Phoenician galley reeled amid the mounting seas as under the thrusts of so many gigantic hands, and jets of spray shot high over her bows to splash down into the fetid dark where the slave drivers prowled along their gangways and lashed the sweating wretches on their inclined benches.

Slowly but surely the Phoenician ship so decreased her quarry's lead that shaggy marines in pointed helmets gathered, cursing, to huddle beneath the bulwarks or peered ahead through the wind filled dark. Soon the light was but a scant cable's length ahead, whereupon the men of Tyre made ready to board.

"Now more to port, you dull dogs!" The Phoenician captain added his weight to that of the three men already straining to control the steering oar. "In a minute we'll have them."

Up! The light shone clear, yellow-red, and dead ahead. Now the light was eclipsed. Down into the trough and wet blackness engulfed the trireme. Up! The light again.

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"Make ready!" Gisco, his fierce, hawk-like head thrust far out, flung aside his brine-sodden sea cloak and gripped the bulwarks. Suddenly he drew back, swearing, "Baal! Look! Look at that!"

CHAPTER II.

STOWAWAY.

EVEN the Phoenician's spray-splashed helmsmen saw it now. Just ahead of their plunging galley was the light at last.

"Baal!" A lantern had been lashed to a broken oar handle which in turn had been secured to an empty but carefully ballasted wine keg!

Of the fugitive ship not a trace was to be seen. This was not strange because, just as his decoy had been dropped overside, Lysander had braced his naked feet on the deck and, with Cleon's help, had swung the galley hard a-port. For a little while he had had to risk being swamped by driving through the trough of the sea.

"Careful, or by the high gods we are lost!" All the crew from young Cleon on the hortator's bench to the bow-most oarsman had stared in an agony of doubt until Lysander's invention went swaying and bobbing off astern, its lantern gilding the innumerable foaming wave crests all about it.

Refreshed by an energy born of a new hope, the islanders bent to their toil once more and, silent and invisible as an owl in flight, the Persepone struggled off through the darkness.

"Hope those Phoenician dogs will be fooled—but I doubt it," panted a middle aged mariner called Timon who, clutching the aplustre, or stern figurehead, with one arm, peered back into the tumult of sea and wind. "They're so crafty they could steal the collar from old Cerberus himself!"

The following interval was one which Lysander remembered until his last hour. Did not all his bright hopes and that of all Chios as well now lie in a very delicately adjusted balance? What of the amazing, almost reckless campaign he had planned—that campaign of which his companions knew nothing as yet? The Phoenician ship being larger and higher-sided, he feverishly tried to convince himself, *must* remain visible long after the little Persepone had become lost amid the now formidable rollers.

Like a pin point of light let in on the sable backdrop of night, the decoy lantern was now bobbing and lurching a good quarter of a mile astern, then an indistinct black outline briefly eclipsed its feeble radiance.

"Faster! Faster!" Leaving the oar to Cleon and the Theban, Lysander leapt below and, scrambling onto the seat of an oarsman who had fallen utterly exhausted into the knee deep water on the galley's bottom, helped to send the fugitive craft on its sluggish course.

At the end of twenty minutes even the most pessimistic of the crew admitted that the pursuit had been shaken off, and with one accord the rowers broke into a breathless pæan of thanks to Poseidon, overlord of the sea and of all its creatures.

As if the wind had risen with Lysander's fears, so with them it slackened off towards dawn, permitting the bone-weary crew to pull in their oars and to snatch a precious three hours of sleep ere broadening day set them once more to dodging the myriad ships of Darius Codomannus III, Supreme Autocrat of the Medes, Persians, and twenty subject nations.

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There had been no sleep at all, however, for three members of the Persepone's company. Lysander, because here at last was dawning the long hoped for day. Since when had he not planned and pondered about this expedition? Easily since he had been first able to lift his father's heavy shield, brave with its ornate Gorgon's head done in gleaming gold.

Conon, too, did not sleep, perhaps because the man was almost tireless, quite emotionless, and very glad once more to be setting out upon another of those aimless, martial adventures which, after all, were his career. The third sleepless person, prompted by an instinctive sense of drama to await the coming of daylight, lay wet, shivering and unnoticed beneath the galley's short foredeck.

REFRESHED by a balmy land breeze off Asia Minor, and charmed by the eternal miracle of dawn, Lysander stood at the steering oar watching the sun's first rays outline with molten gold the bold headlands of Lydia.

Far off to port, the mystic isle of Lesbos drew a dim line on the gray horizon. Eyes narrowed, he looked beyond the weather-beaten figurehead, and felt his finger tips tingle. Ahead lay the vast domains of Darius, lord of a hundred million subjects and ruler of the mighty empire which Lysander planned to attack with thirty followers—to begin with.

Away up yonder, somewhere to the north of east, the compact and untried army of Alexander of Macedonia must be encamped, waiting for the daylight to speed it on past Sestus and the Hellespont. His, it seemed, was another dauntless adventure—but on the grand scale. Alexander? The Islander wondered about Alexander—odd to reflect that another man scarcely older than himself was bent on the same mission.

A tern wheeled over the motionless Persepone, craned its short neck downwards, screeched an impudent *s-tar-ee-ek!* and then sped arrow-like towards a pair of blue headlands marking the entrance to the Bay of Hermae. Fixedly, the young Greek's dark blue eyes studied that headland. Beyond it lay Phocaea and the wealth to realize his ambitions.

"You'd better catch a nap, my lord." His one eye bright as that of a bird of prey, the Theban soldier of fortune came swinging up, his scarred and well muscled chest bare to the morning breeze. "Look at your men—they've got sense. Take a rest—I'll keep watch."

"They're my men, Conon, but I'm the King of Chios." The natural dignity of Lysander's statement robbed it of any tinge of egotism, but he stretched his limbs until their joints cracked and he grinned boyishly all the while.

"Did you see that tern?" the Theban presently inquired.

"Yes. I take it for a good omen for today. Did you see how it flew straight towards the mainland?" So saying, he caught up a gourd of water and after drenching his face and chest with its contents he went among the rowing benches to clap his companions on shoulder or thigh, quite unaware that he was being narrowly watched by the third sleepless person aboard.

"Turn out! Up with you! Nicias, Cleon, Damon, and you, Lyrsas, hit the deck! Tomorrow by this time we'll all be rich—yes, by all the gods, we'll have such arms and armor as Homer would be glad to sing about!"

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Drugged with sleep, the galley's crew stared at him red eyed, then, thinking they had missed the point of some joke, began to laugh uncertainly. Lysander, however, cut them short.

"No, I'm not raving. Shake the lead out of your heads and when we've had a bite I'll tell you of what I've been planning for the last two years!"

One by one, the thirty washed the sleep from their eyes, stretched prodigiously, then gingerly examined their blistered hands. These they presently bathed in diluted wine. Next the islanders opened their food wallets and brought out bread, cheese, and garlic, also a curious kind of meat paste composed of ground dried meat and onions. They dipped up the substance from the sheep's bladders in which it had been packed. Soon they were all eating heartily if noisily at the break of the poop, and washing down their food with a sour red wine which was the best that stricken Chios could produce nowadays.

WISE with the coaching of Conon and the old queen—she had seen as much as any man of those little wars which were forever flaming up between the city-states of Greece—Lysander waited until the crew had finished their meal and began belching or lazily picking their teeth.

"It was from a fisherman out of Ephesus," Lysander began, "that I first heard of Phocaea."

"Phocaea?"

"Yes. Mazaeus, the Satrap of Syria, has one of his summer palaces there. This fisherman, it seemed, had been a servant in the palace for a while."

"Well," demanded Cleon, still licking his fingers, "what's that to us, my lord?"

One strong sunburned head after another turned, and many pairs of eyes still red from sleep studied their leader's figure so sharply outlined against the morning sky. Only one pair, however, noted how lazily Lysander's shoulder-long yellow curls stirred with the eastward breeze, and with what unconscious grace his big body yielded to every lift and sway of the drifting galley.

"You're not planning to move in, are you?" demanded a big, black haired young noble, his mouth very full of bread and cheese.

"You're not so far wrong, friend Clitus. Mazaeus, may all the gods smite him, is never at Phocaea at this time of year."

"Are you sure?"

"He has never been there during May; at this time of year he always holds court at Sardis. The Ephesian said Mazaeus is so sure that no one would dare come against a satrap of Darius' that he hasn't very many guards on duty there."

"What do you mean by not many guards?"

"Oh, only two hundred or so," said the young king hurriedly.

"Only two hundred," Timon roared. "Great Zeus! and only thirty-two of us!"

A breathless silence followed black Timon's explosion. At the sheer audacity of what Lysander intimated, more than one of the simple islanders remained with mouths ludicrously open. Old Conon, smiling to himself, only continued to remove the rust spots from his armor.

"Tonight, when most of the guards are at mess and when Mazaeus' household is dining, if thirty-two men moved fast and hit hard, a lot could be done."

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"You're crazy! It'd be suicide to try such a thing."

"No, such a raid isn't as impossible as it sounds. Besides, we've got to find money, a new ship, and decent arms very quickly if we're to stand a chance. Here's another interesting bit of news: they say Mazaeus' Greek mercenaries are fed up with loafing about Phocaea and want to get in the fighting against Alexander."

Excitedly, Timon leaped to his feet. "But, Lysander, what you suggest is madness, sheer madness. How could we ever get by the palace water gate?"

"That part is easiest of all. As we all know, Mazaeus is always ready to pay good money for mercenaries from the islands. To the captain of the water gate we'll be recruits on the way to enroll."

"But suppose we fail?" some one suggested. "You know what'll happen? It'll mean crucifixion—or at least the whips and branding irons. Very likely they would blind us and send us to rot in the Great King's salt mines beyond the Euxine Sea."

"True enough, lad," came Conon's comment. "But still there's a lot to what Lysander says. You see, five years ago I served a hitch in the bodyguard of the Satrap of Bactria, and I know what a garrison gets to be like in peace times—Lysander's right. The Persians are so swollen with pride and so damned sure of themselves that a quick raid might be successful"—he lifted a curious two foot stabbing sword to emphasize the point—"*if* the commander of the palace guard isn't a Greek, and if Mazaeus isn't there."

"The curse of Pluto on all renegade Greeks," snapped the impetuous Cleon. "Why will our people take service with these scented and perfumed despots who ravage all the world?"

"Well, it's because a lot of the islanders and even plenty on the mainland, too, are just as poor as we are. There's another reason—we Greeks, the gods alone know why, have always fought among ourselves since the dawn of time. Until Alexander followed Philip to the throne of Macedonia, we've had no leader strong enough to unify us.

"And, young fellow"—with his one eye he fixed a piercing regard on the man who had spoken—"you'd better get over one misconception in a hurry. Don't fool yourself about the Persians!

"Though some of them, for a fact, are scented, painted, and soft, most of them aren't afraid of anything, and are still the very devil to fight."

A BABBLE of argument raged until Lysander terminated it by beating with his sword upon his dented old breastplate. Thanks to Mazaeus, the island had been swept so bare of armor that his cuirass had had to be solemnly rifled from the tomb of a long dead king.

"Now listen; just about sunset we will row up to the water gate of the palace. Conon, here, who speaks Persian better than I, will do the talking. Remember to act your parts up to the hilt—we're lost if we're even suspected. Once we're beached inside the harbor we'll straggle off in the direction of the barracks, but when I give the signal some of you will go with Conon, some with Cleon, and the rest with me. Now look at this and memorize it—your lives will depend upon your knowing where to go without delay."

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Dipping a forefinger into a bowl of wine, Lysander sketched on the deck a rough ground-plan memorized from the one drawn by the Ephesian and ex-servant of the satrap. Even with his eyes shut the islander knew he could find his way through those vast corridors to the banquet hall, the walls of which were rumored to be veneered with mother of pearl and sea green talc; the satrap's own quarters he already knew were faced with blood red marble quarried in the mysterious land of the Sabateans, and sculptured with winged bulls done in relief. The floors of the favorite concubine's apartments were said to be of ebony inlaid with ivory, gold, and jade.

With special care the islander pointed out the treasury; this he stated was protected by six slaves armed, but chained to the vault doors.

"Conon's detachment will go there and seize what they can. And this"—Lysander planted his reddened finger on a spacious chamber—"is the armory; there, Cleon, you and your men will find fine steel swords brought by the Carthagenians from Iberia which lies beyond the Pillars of Herakles. There should also be much fine armor. I myself will go to the administration rooms, where I'm told that dog-fathered satrap keeps my father's signet among his trophies. It is the center of the palace and a good place to start a fire."

As he detailed his plans, Lysander's voice deepened, his gestures grew more emphatic, and under the spell of his enthusiasm those present listened in rapt attention. Again and again, while the Persepone rolled lazily amid the glassy sea, he made each member describe his duty in the projected onslaught.

"And now," he queried, "are there any questions? Speak up if it isn't all absolutely clear."

Conon raised his grizzled head.

"What about those galleys that chased us last night? Where do you think they were headed?"

"To Mitylene on Lesbos," three or four voices promptly suggested.

"Or to Assus, farther up the coast," Cleon volunteered.

The veteran uttered a short barking laugh. "And why not to Phocaea? I am not saying that's where they *are* headed, but they're our greatest danger. If any one of those galleys has beached there before us, the garrison will have learned there's a Greek galley about. That will get us damned short shrift once we're inside the water gate. Remember, those Phoenician dogs know the Persepone by sight."

"But they won't go to Phocaea," Cleon said firmly.

CONON

"Why so sure?"

"Because I had a dream last night; I dreamt of a rich city taken by storm. Isn't that a good omen?"

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Delighted cries broke forth because, after the ancient Grecian tradition, deep significance was attached to such dreams.

"We must chance it," Lysander decided, but some of his former assurance had departed. "Almost all the ships along this coast are on the Mitylene trade route."

THEN followed a general discussion which became so earnest that not one of the islanders noted the approach of a lithe figure which, in rich, black-painted armor, emerged from under the foredeck and now came striding aft, a tall, yellow plume of horsehair flaunting bright in the rays of the new risen sun. Dozens of sunbeams glanced off a head of Medusa which had been worked in heavy red gold upon the stranger's round shield. As if to heighten the mystery, the warrior's features were almost completely hidden by the nose and cheek pieces of a small Athenian helmet which was topped with a sphinx cunningly wrought with gold and having eyes of gleaming emeralds.

Lysander, glancing up from his crude floor plan, was the first to behold this martial apparition in gold decorated armor; and his hand flew to his sword as he called, "Who are you?"

"A stranger to you, my lord, and yet not unknown!"

When the armored figure drew his sword, Lysander caught up his shield, unsheathed his own sword, and sprang to meet the stranger advancing so purposefully along that gangway which separated the port from the starboard rowing benches.

"Halt where you are! Who are you?" he repeated.

All about him the men of Chios were leaping to secure their arms, for not one of them wore helmet, cuirass or had a buckler with which to protect himself.

Conon bent and straightened with a wicked little javelin ready to hurl.

"Lysander, King of Chios"—the man in armor halted, then raised his sword—"I have traveled far to find you!"

"Now by all the shades of Hades," Lysander growled as he advanced, "who are you, and what are you doing aboard my galley? No more evasions."

Quite deliberately the stranger lowered his sword before replying in a rich, low voice:

"I come to fight certain enemies of my people."

"Then if you won't answer me, Pluto take you!"

Moving in the swift and powerful leap of a hunting leopard, Lysander sprang forward and suddenly knocked aside the stranger's sword even as he raised it into the "on guard" position. At the same time he flung his left arm around the strange warrior's waist and grappled. An instant later he wrenched off the yellow plumed black helmet and found himself staring into a furious face that was scarlet with either exertion or emotion. As if stung by a dagger's point, he sprang back, still clutching the helmet, and stiffened, his dark blue eyes wide in thunderstruck amazement.

"What crazy joke is this?" he demanded.

From the half armed men among the rowing benches arose a whistling gasp of surprise; for down the skillfully fashioned backplate was rippling a brief cascade of golden red hair brighter than a copper shield set in the sun.

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"A woman, by all the gods!" one of them howled.

IT was rather a girl's face which had been so roughly revealed; too aquiline to be pretty, it was yet subtly beautiful of shape and proportion. There was nothing soft about either the small red mouth now drawn into an angry slash, or her great eyes which were wide set and as uncertainly blue-green as a summer sea.

"Kyria!" gasped Lysander, mightily upset. "How did you get here?"

"I was aboard the fishing boat from Tenedos—I bribed the fellow to carry me to Chios," she snapped. "It was easy to hide aboard the Persepone."

"You have run away?"

"Say rather that I left without my father's knowledge."

"Then may the dear gods protect Chios from the wrath of Menander of Naxos!" Cleon snapped.

Contempt curled the girl's bright lip. "You need have no fear. My father had no idea where I went."

"But, Kyria, what of Xenias—you are affianced to the Corinthian, aren't you?"

"Oh, he's a sour, dull dog—to Pluto with him!" she replied airily. "And now please remember, it is Kyros who sails with you; not Kyria, daughter of Menander. Kyros, who can and will do a man's share, who can eat a man's food and fight a man's battle. Kyros, who—"

The girl's voice was drowned out in a hoarse bellow of laughter; Conon, on the little poop deck, stood clutching his stomach with both hands and shaking with merriment.

"I've traveled far and wide," he roared between guffaws. "All the way from Marsala to the Danube, and from the Danube to the river Indus, but so help me Bacchus I've never seen a live Amazon before! Well, Lysander, here's another good omen for us. A lusty wench like her should bring three hundred minae, at the least, on any slave block along this coast.

"And look at that armor! It's worth five hundred darics* if it's worth an obol!"

"A gift from Venus herself!" cried a young man called Damon. "We'll draw lots, what say?"

His thin cheeks invaded with a rush of color, Lysander whirled on his grinning shipmates.

"Be quiet, you blind idiots. The girl deserves what she gets, but haven't any of you any sense? Can't you foresee what would follow if Menander learned we'd sold his precious daughter into slavery?"

There followed a sudden dying away of laughter, for held in fear and high respect throughout the lower Agean was the hot tempered King of Naxos—one of the last Ionic kings still able to defend his domain from Egyptian, Persian, and Phoenician alike.

Therefore it was in anxious and righteous wrath that the yellow-headed islander towered above this girl in black and gold armor; she, reading the hot fury of his eyes, fell back an uncertain pace.

"Better heave her o v e r b o a r d! Fishes don't talk," called one of the rowers. "Then we'll have a secret we'll *have* to keep."

"Aye. That's the only sure way to stop talk—I've an old father and some sisters back on—"

"That'll do," Lysander snapped. "We're Greeks, not damned Persian butchers." He glowered at the stowaway. "Just what have I done to you

* Daric—about five dollars.

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that you should put my people and me in a situation like this?"

IN a measure recovering herself, Kyria raised her greenish eyes to meet the angry ones of dark blue.

"You flatter yourself, my lord. The only reason I came on your galley is because you seemed to offer the quickest way to a certain goal I've set for myself."

"What goal?"

"Just because I'm a woman do I have to live like a slave—always at the beck and call of men? Haven't I just as much a right to wander and fight as you—if I've a mind to? Why should I be refused a chance to join in your fight against our people's enemies?"

Lysander stared, then, at a loss what to think, sputtered, "Why, why, it's all wrong—you're a girl. Can't you see you'd be nothing but a hindrance, a drag?

"You'd be worse than useless. The first dead body you'll see will set you vomiting into that pretty painted shield of yours!"

"I'd hoped you wouldn't talk like this." The pallor of Kyria's olive cheeks vanished amid a scarlet flood. "But since you have, give me my helmet, and if I don't beat any man of your crew in a fair fight, you can set me ashore at the first land you touch, and on my sacred oath to Artemis I'll never tell on whose galley I sailed."

Conon sprang up, his one eye narrowed and his lips set in a drooping curve.

"You talk big, lass—"

Hotly the slim creature spun about. "Dare you fight me?"

"Dare!" The Theban gaped an instant like a mastiff teased by an audacious kitten. "Blast me if our little hell cat doesn't sound in earnest."

"I *am* in earnest."

"All right, then I'll fight you, Puss, but first we'll make a little bargain. If you win, you take my armor and I'll obey to the letter any two commands you're minded to give me, even though it's to clip Darius' beard."

"And if I lose?" The girls brows flickered up.

"Then your armor becomes mine, and you'll become my war wife."

The color ebbed sharply from Kyria's cheeks.

"That's no sporting bargain," Lysander protested. "Besides, such a thing won't do. Great Zeus, Conon, d'you forget this silly fool is Menander's own daughter?"

"Save your precious scruples, my lord, I'll beat him easily."

The girl brushed past Lysander and, so swiftly that the Theban could not forestall her, brought her hand smacking against the veteran's calloused cheek.

"Yours are a dog's terms," she cried contemptuously, "yet I'll fight you on them."

"Sand the poop deck, some of you." Half angry, half amused, the Theban tested his smitten cheek an instant; then, chuckling, began to buckle on his breastplate and greaves.

"You're not really going to hurt her?" Lysander demanded in a low undertone as he adjusted the well oiled straps of the Theban's cuirass.

"It won't be necessary," the other replied, and turning aside, drew from its leather covered sheath a sword unusual because a short hook had been forged into its back edge.

Her great eyes become hard and bright, Kyria studied the new risen sun an instant, maneuvered to get it at her

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back, and then tightened the chin strap of her helmet before she turned to face the one eyed veteran.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

LEANING against the battered lead ball which formed a counterweight on the butt of the Persepone's great steering oar, Lysander with decidedly mixed emotions watched the two combatants face off on the dew wetted quarter-deck. He felt no qualms. Conon would quickly disarm the hoyden in a couple of passes and the whole affair would be swiftly terminated by setting the foolhardy girl ashore. She would not talk; he knew Menander's daughter well enough to be sure of that.

From among the rowing benches thirty-odd red and brown faces peered up at the two sharply contrasted antagonists. The girl was tall and slender as Conon was short and thick bodied; Kyria was clad in sturdy but graceful black armor, while the Theban mercenary was protected but by a battered cuirass and plain helmet ornamented by only a light green crest.

As the two maneuvered warily, they reminded Lysander of a she-wolf he had once watched circling just out of reach of a gray bull buffalo's lance-like horns, watching and waiting for a quick rush.

A sudden doubt slowed Lysander's breath—the struggle might not be over so quickly. Kyria's legs were powerful as well as shapely, and her arm, when she thrust and parried, was as firmly muscled as that of a young man. Through the eye holes of her helmet he could catch the deadly intent gleam of her jade green eyes.

At first the strangely matched pair only fenced warily over the sanded deck, Conon all the while calling out taunting names and obscene suggestions.

"Why hesitate, my little vixen? Come on."

The girl's answer was a hissing, reckless laugh which revealed not a trace of fear. As suddenly as a thrown spear, Menander's daughter leaped in, her sword point licking out like a tongue of flame.

"Ho!" yelled the watchers, and gripped each other. "Look! Damned if the wench hasn't really nicked old One Eye!"

Lysander's uneasy laughter died as he cried out a warning when Conon, roaring with amazed fury, surged forward, his shield flashing like fire in the rays of the rising sun. He aimed a whirring, whistling cut which must have pierced the Amazon's shield and cuirass had it not found only empty air.

"Easy, you fool! You'll hurt her!" the islander yelled.

Kyria, however, was halfway across the gently heaving quarter-deck, and in her turn jeering at the infuriated mercenary. Blood was dripping from a shallow cut across his cheek, and his expression was savage as death itself. Just in time, Kyria sprang away from one of the Theban's murderous slashes, and this time her shield clanged under one of the veteran's blows.

"Zeus! She's down!" gasped Cleon.

But the helmsman was wrong. The lesser figure's sword blade flickered up from her half crouching stance to send blood spurting from the mercenary's knee.

Stung, the Theban gave ground and left off his jeering, whereupon Lysander felt his finger tips grow cold. Up

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until now the one eyed veteran had fought only in half earnest, but now—Had Kyria, too, become aware of her adversary's change in attitude?

"Stop this nonsense, it's gone far enough," cried Lysander and caught up a spear with which to strike up the glittering swords.

"Leave us alone," furiously panted the Amazon. "Look out, Cyclops, this time I'm going to kill you."

Kyria's reckless laugh filled the air when, for a third time, she attempted that lightning attack which seemed too fast for the Theban's defense. Just in time did Conon spring back.

THERE seemed no doubt now that the mercenary was in difficulties, though not much blood had stained the trampled sand underfoot. On watching Kyria's yellow horsehair crest go flashing back and forth, Lysander sensed her preparations for a final thrust and reëxperienced the sensations of riding a swing into a breathless arc. He felt that same appalling breathlessness which came before the swing started its downward sweep. Yes, it was like that just now.

"Ha!" The men of Chios uttered a breathless half shout when, like a great butterfly, the yellow crest darted low; simultaneously Kyria's sword flashed upwards in a lightning thrust.

Half expecting to see Conon fall, Lysander started forward; the girl, however, flinched violently back, gasping and staring at her empty sword hand.

Down upon the deck her weapon clattered and was promptly pinned beneath one of Conon's copper soled cothurns. Then, like a tiger springing at a sleek black leopard, Conon charged and by a wrestling trick flung Kyria heavily to the deck.

Laughing uproariously, the Theban put one foot on her breastplate, at the same time levelling his curious sword at the girl's throbbing white throat. For a long instant he maintained the pose, then turned on his heel and dabbed contemptuously at the two cuts he had suffered. The girl he left to lie panting where she had fallen; the bewildered, horrified expression on her features was to be clearly seen, because her helmet had clanged off, releasing a bright flood of shoulder long hair.

"It—it—was a trick," she gasped and, tragic-eyed, struggled up on one elbow. "That hook—back of his sword—"

"There are lots of tricks to war, my girl," the Theban observed. "Most as many as there are to love. And now let's see what's under that fancy armor of yours."

In numbed dismay, the girl blinked up, first at the leather featured Theban, then at Lysander standing frowning beside the steering oar. Evidently things were not at all to his liking.

"But—but—I didn't—I can't—"

"You lost," Lysander grimly cut her short. "Give Conon the armor; he won it."

Her flushed features set in a rigid expression, Kyria got to her feet and began to fumble at the waist straps securing her cuirass to the backplate. She did not weep, though two angry tears welled from the corners of her eyes and slid over the olive smoothness of her cheeks.

Presently she lifted off the finely tempered bronze and dropped it ringing at her conqueror's feet. As in a dream she then knelt on the blood-spotted deck to remove the greaves protecting her leg from ankle to knee.

To spare Kyria further derisive grins and the coarse witticisms of his

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crew, Lysander curtly ordered out the oars; and, taking post at the helm, he steered for the westernmost headland of the Island of Lesbos. Steadfastly he scanned the horizon, but the incredible blue of the Mediterranean was

KYRIA

only dotted with harmless little brown and black sails—fishing boats beating slowly out to their favorite grounds. Of the ships which had chased the Persepone so hard there was no trace.

"What rotten luck!" Lysander muttered. "Oh, damn that hare-brained girl!" By all the rules he should only be exultant to have escaped the perils of the night before, but the sudden injection of King Menander's wilful daughter into his expedition argued unforeseen and downright dangerous possibilities. The Theban he must not antagonize; he needed him, both as a fighter and for his war wisdom; yet—

HIS meditations were interrupted by Conon calling, "Come here, my sweet chuck. I've bet Timon fifty minae you kiss a damn sight better than you fight."

"No! Keep your dirty paws off me!" There followed a hurried patter of feet and Lysander turned in time to see the mercenary, flushed and purposeful, in the act of cornering Kyria. It was a revelation to see the girl in her present guise; despite her man's chiton of fine yellow wool, she now little resembled a stripling boy, and her attitude was one that revealed certain curves which, though restrained, were none the less distinctly feminine.

"Oh, let her alone, Conon," Lysander attempted diplomacy. "You'll admit she put up a good fight, so be a good fellow and don't tease the kid any more. You've got her armor."

The Theban, however, seemed not to h e a r; and, beneath the Persepone's lotus leaf aplustre, he seized the now wholly terrified girl. Wrapping arms thick and brown as pythons about Menander's daughter, he began crushing her to him and laughing at the frantic beating of her hands against his face. Conon had kissed his captive only once when Lysander's hand fell on his shoulder and wrenched him back.

"Can't you take a hint? Quit it, I said!" Lysander warned in a deadly calm tone.

"Stand aside, damn you!"

"Have you gone crazy? Kyria's just a silly romantic girl. A joke's a joke, but this girl comes of a royal house and I'll not stand your pawing and mauling her about like a tavern wench!"

"Now, by Pluto, I'll show you what—" The Theban's hand darted to his sword hilt, but it remained pinioned there by a grip only less yielding than the bite of a pair of pincers.

"Steady, Conon. I'll admit part of this mess is my doing. If I'd had any idea you were going to insist on the

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full terms of your bargain, I'd never have permitted that duel to begin."

"I wasn't fighting for any of your ideas. A bargain's a bargain—and I don't give a damn if her father's Darius Codomannus himself. The wench pleases me and, by Ares, I'll have her!"

An old scar running across the bridge of Conon's nose turned purple-red and the eyelid over his drooping empty socket throbbed visibly as he snarled his ultimatum.

In a small, strangled voice, Kyria intervened.

"Thank you, Lysander; still this beast is right. I was a fool, but Menander's daughter keeps her word!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Lysander cried in a perplexed fury. He turned on the Theban again. "Do you think I'll let my island be ravaged just because you want to make a mistress of this empty-headed girl?"

Conon, however, merely struggled to free his sword hand and a steady flow of curses spouted from his lips.

The crew now deserted their oars to make certain significant preparations. They, too, were remembering Menander's swift war galleys and hard bitten marines.

Ever a good soldier, whatever his faults, Conon saw the hopelessness of his position and stepped back, fuming. "Very well, if you mean to cheat me, I can't stop you!"

"Go forward and stay there!" was Lysander's curt command to Kyria.

She turned and, with a muffled sob, ran forward on the gangway, leaving the islander to deal with his raging companion.

"Surely, Conon, you must see—"

"I can see only one thing," the Theban snarled. "You've cheated me of the spoil I risked my life to win! Charon take that damned little viper! As soon as we land, you're going to fight me. Damned if I'll stand for any young whippersnapper who thinks he's a soldier robbing me of my winnings! Why don't you take the wench's armor, too?"

JUST in time, Lysander recalled one of the old queen's sayings, "He who loses his temper loses a shield of triple thickness." There was, Lysander perceived, imperative need for diplomacy. It would never do to permit dissension at the outset of the expedition.

"I won't fight you, Conon," he said, forcing a smile, "and I've already admitted that the blame for this silly business is largely mine. So I'll either buy you three war wives as pretty as Kyria, or I'll pay you an indemnity of five hundred minae—once we're clear of Phocaea. How's that?"

Conon merely glowered.

"Come, old friend, you know how much I need your wisdom and experience." He laid a placating hand on the Theban's shoulder and held out the other. "Besides, Kyria's too damn thin, anyway."

Conon nodded sulkily. "All right, have it your way. I'll take the indemnity and twenty minae more for the wench's armor—it's no use to me now," he mumbled and tramped off to the stern.

Finding the wind favorable towards noon, Lysander ordered hoisted the Persepone's only sail—a triangular brown and yellow affair, with many varicolored patches. Heaving grateful sighs, the weary rowers drew in their oars and promptly stretched out on the bottom to rehearse their parts and to discuss their chances in the attempt on Mazaeus' property. Again and

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again the yellow haired King of Chios queried his followers, argued and explained until even he was satisfied every man aboard had his part letter perfect.

It was not until the galley was plowing a broad white streak over an endless succession of sapphire-colored rollers and was standing in towards the soft blue headlands of the Ionian coast that Lysander caught up Kyria's armor and, feeling uncommonly foolish, stalked forward to that dark hutch in which the would-be Amazon had again concealed herself.

"Kyria!"

He had to call her name twice before she would answer.

"Well? What does my lord wish?"

"We must talk."

When she appeared, great eyes somber with misery, there was yet no trace of broken spirit in them.

"Here's your armor."

"You're giving it back? Why?"

"You may need it tonight."

"Then I'm to go with you?"

"Yes. On account of the chase last night it's too risky for us to try landing you on Lesbos. We'll have to wait until after our attack upon Phocaea."

"By what right are you giving me back the armor?" she demanded evenly.

"I—well, I purchased it from Conon."

"You purchased it! And do I still belong to that Theban wolf?"

"No." Lysander's reply was a little lame. "I bought you, too. Had to—"

"Had to." A bitter smile curved the arrogant lips. "Am I such a bad bargain?"

"For five hundred minae—yes."

She flushed to her ear tips.

"Um. So Menander's daughter isn't worth that much. Zeus, how angry father would be to hear it!"

"It was safety for my people I was buying," he retorted hotly. "I'd not give as many obols for you alone."

A long moment the two stood glaring at each other.

"Then I take it you are my master?"

"Yes. And don't make any mistake about that," he said unwisely. "You do as I say till I can get rid of you."

BEING young and wholly absorbed with his great ambition, Lysander missed the sudden exasperation in Kyria's face, nor did he notice the peculiar quality of her voice in her next question.

"Just why," she demanded almost abstractedly, "do you dislike me so? When I—my father offered me to you, they told me you put him off with some phrases about being unworthy of so great an honor."

"I did."

"Why did you do it?"

"It flattered your father and let me comfortably out."

"What could be more important than the hand of Menander's daughter?"

In sardonic amusement Lysander surveyed the aggressive, muscular figure before him. Damn it, she should have been meek, frightened, or at least contrite.

"There happen to be some important things for me to do—though you mightn't agree. For instance, you must have seen how little is left of Chios—I must rebuild my realm."

"Don't you think I could help you?"

"You?" He stared. "A wilful, selfish half-girl like you?"

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"Half-girl!" Kyria winced.

"Yes. When I marry, I want a real woman. One who's tender, melting, and feminine; not a young she-wolf who strides about like a Spartan hoplite."

"Oh—I see." Quickly she dropped her eyes. "Then, Lysander of Chios, you're as big a fool as most of these men who fall in love with a soft handed ninny because she'll giggle, dimple, and cling to them like a vine to a temple pillar!" Suddenly her anger flared. "You think because that mercenary beat me on a trick"—her red-brown lips tightened—"that I can't fight? All right, I'll prove to you I can. With a bow and arrow I can beat even the finest archers of Egypt or Ind."

"You'll not stay aboard this galley longer than tomorrow morning," snapped the young king in unconscious prophecy—

How little was he able to read the future!

So they glared at each other until Kyria stooped swiftly and caught up her weapons to disappear once more beneath the foredeck, leaving a sadly perplexed young man to stare at the sparkling afternoon sea.

Gradually the splendor of the day and the youth of the Persepone's company asserted themselves. Not even the sight of two squadrons of Persian warships, one numbering fifty sails and another of thirty-odd, served to dampen their spirits. They merely pulled to the shelter of a group of islets and, from a safe distance, watched the naval might of Darius cruise by.

Indeed, the islanders dozed, squabbled, and amicably sang until an hour before sundown, when amid deep silence Lysander sacrificed Hippolyta's pair of doves to Zeus. The prayer finished, he then poured a libation of wine overside as a petition for the help of Poseidon. Only Conon sat aside and, though he no longer scowled and even cracked an occasional joke with the rest, a gleam sprang to his eye whenever Kyria passed.

Thus the galley worked gradually into the Bay of Hermae, her very smallness a good disguise. Not long before sunset Lysander ordered the single yard swung about and was about to speak when he beheld, far off to the east, three sails which, because they were purple with a white panel in the center, indicated the presence of Cyprian galleys. Running before the wind, the three vessels were making fast progress on a northerly course. Were they headed for Mitylene on Lesbos; or would they ere long turn to follow the Persepone into the Gulf of Hermae? No telling.

Soberly, the islander held his ship's prow on its course towards Phocaea, and presently forgot about the enigmatic sails out yonder. Ahead lay the incredible, intoxicating wealth of Mazaeus!

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK.

FOR the adventurers a bad quarter hour was in store. At the mouth of Phocaea Harbor they encountered a round bowed gaoul, deep with oil, grain, and wood, and heading out—bound perhaps for the naval base port of Assus. Seeming enormous in the twilight, she loomed up on the starboard bow and sailed by so close that her Sidonian captain could be seen peering down at Lysander, who remained at the Persepone's steering oar. Would she smell an enemy? See anything suspicious about the Persepone?

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Apparently nothing aroused the merchantman's suspicions, for she drew abreast, then plowed by so close that the smaller ship's crew could even make out members of her company eating their evening meal about a fire built on an earthen hearth mounted on the gaoul's foredeck. Quite as calmly as if he were steering into Chios Harbor, Lysander waved a greeting, then turning, fixed his eyes on a group of low, topless towers which, off to port, thrust their bulk above a huge park of trees to dominate the thriving little port of Phocaea.

Perhaps a hundred yards distant from Mazaeus' private harbor, two dozen long and narrow fishing boats lay at anchor—forerunners of those dreaded feluccas which would, centuries later, bear Islamic corsairs to conquest and pillage.

"Great Poseidon! Is that the palace?" Cleon was pointing to a huge building which sparkled and shone with a thousand and one pin points of lamplight. An awed murmur spread when tower after tower, terrace after terrace, appeared before the wondering eyes of the islanders.

When, with her greased oarlocks *thud-thudding* softly, the old galley crept in towards a tall water gate topped by a beacon fire, it seemed as if an invisible hand were slowly closing around Lysander's throat. Ye gods! How very lofty were yonder dim watchtowers, how terrifyingly numerous were the endless rows of windows, all a-gleam with light.

Striving to remain calm as example, the island king forced his every movement to be controlled, and he struggled to keep his voice level.

By his side Conon, for all his turbulent past, also was fighting to keep down his excitement.

"Well, it's all right so far," the veteran pronounced. "No one seems to have given an alarm about us." He pointed to the right and squinted through the deepening dusk. "That smoke rising above the barracks means that those fat Aetolian swine are still stuffing their guts. When we land, you'd better let me do the talking. Your Persian isn't bad, but you don't know the true mercenary's lingo."

Only a hundred yards farther, Lysander mused, and then *the moment* for which he had planned and trained so many monotonous years would be at hand! The men were behaving well, but one could feel the strain they were under.

Had he deliberately tried to assemble a more motley armed crew, Lysander realized he could scarcely have succeeded better. No two of his followers were equipped alike.

As he steered into the zone of orange light cast by the beacon, Lysander cast a single backward glance, and his anxiety returned. What was that indistinct glimmer? Was it caused by the gaoul's mainsail—or the sails of the ships he had sighted off the Cape of Hermae? For an instant he wavered—after all, it wouldn't be much of a triumph if, loot burdened, the Persepone were to find her retreat cut off by triremes similar to those which, at its very outset, had so nearly put a period to her adventure.

MOVING with the inexorability of an incoming tide, the adventure engulfed the Persepone and her company. How very loud sounded the creaking *thud-thud* of the oars. Their weathered stonework aglow in the beacon's glare, a pair of crenelated towers, protecting the palace's water

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gate, loomed in the starlit darkness.

The wailing of some poor wretch being whipped in the fort-like barracks behind and to the left of the palace served graphically to remind the invaders of the price of failure. When the tortured creature cried out in Greek, however, a new determination came to supplant the anxiety which had dominated all those taut and sweating young faces.

"Lower the boat!" Lysander called to Cleon. "Conon, go forward and answer the harbor master's hail."

The Theban grunted and nodded, but deliberately finished fluffing a circle of small sponges which, stitched to his helmet lining, at once absorbed the drenching sweat of battle and, in case of a blow, acted as a sort of partial shock absorber.

"You're not still angry because of that Kyria matter?" Lysander queried when the Theban swung by on his way to the bow with his travel stained war-cloak a-sway in a land breeze which smelled of jasmine and orange blossoms.

"We'll talk of that later; mind you act natural when we get into the inner harbor. Ah—there's somebody stirring at last."

A hoarse deep voice challenged first in Persian and then in Greek.

"What galley is that?"

"The Persepone, twenty oars."

"Who is your captain?"

"Conon of Thebes."

"Why do you come to Phocaea?"

Both hands cupped, Conon tilted back his head and shouted, "We're island men—and we've come because we've heard that Memnon, the Great King's general, wants plenty of sound mercenaries. Open up there, or he'll lose the pick of the islands!"

"Pick of the jails, you mean, you damned Greek windbag! I've a mind to keep you outside and let the mosquitoes feed on you till sun-up."

"None but a mangy Cretan would talk like that," Conon roared back, using the strange *lingua franca* of the mercenary soldier. "Open up, or I'll slap your dirty jaws for you."

"How many of you pig eating boasters are there?"

A torch was held on high and by its light Lysander glimpsed the scaled breastplate and high, gilded leather cap of a Persian officer.

"Thirty strong rascals fit to serve in Memnon the Rhodian's own bodyguard. Come on, Frizzle-beard, open up!"

"So there really are only thirty of you garlic destroyers? Well, then, I guess it's all right for you to come inside. Even thirty of you can't stink up the whole place."

The Cretan disappeared, and the breathless islanders could hear him shout some directions which presently set chains to clattering. Two huge doors of wood and iron composing the valves of the palace water gates then swung back so easily and silently that the men of Chios, unfamiliar with such wonders, gaped before obeying Cleon's order to give a dozen strokes—just enough to send the Persepone shooting smoothly beneath a torch-lit arch that dwarfed the shabby, worm-eaten galley.

ACCORDING to previous agreement, the Persepone's crew waved and shouted coarse observations to a quartet of dark bearded archers who, wary at first, lined the walls above the canal. Some of the harbor guards soon began to answer in heavily accented Greek.

Using poles forked at the far end,

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Lysander's crew urged their ship along a short, close walled canal, and presently found themselves about to enter a small inner harbor which probably was a hundred yards in radius. On the level sands of a shelving beach lay drawn up two or three ornate pleasure craft, undoubtedly intended for the use of Mazaeus' family and also of his many concubines; here mooring posts, cunningly carved to represent the heads of swans, serpents, and dolphins, thrust up from the glossy waters.

As the Persepone approached the end of the canal, the Cretan harbor master leaped aboard and clapped Conon on the shoulder.

"Conon, by Mazda! I thought I recognized your brand of swearing. It's good to see you again, you old wolf! What's the news from the north?" he demanded, while tossing a fringed yellow and blue cape back over one shoulder. "They say that the King of Macedonia is coming to invade Asia Minor. Ha! Ha! Poor fool, his army will only serve to glut the slave markets of Lydia and Caria."

"They say he's really going to try it," Conon replied carelessly. "Of course Memnon and the satrap will either kill him or whip him back to where he came from."

"They'll do it inside of a month. Since it's you, Conon, I'll show you where to haul up."

Unaccountably, the backs of Lysander's hands began to itch. Now there could be no thought of retreat; the adventure was under way once and for all. By the all high gods, he had not dreamed that man-made walls could stretch so far as these marvelously decorated battlements just ahead!

Clutching the rawhide wrapped oar handle in a spasmodic grip, Lysander was vastly relieved to see how calmly the six men detailed to kill the guards on the water gate gathered up helmet, shield, and spear. The beach ahead seemed quite deserted, but from the palace floated strains of harp music and a chorus of voices singing some passionate East Indian refrain.

A doubt concerning Conon came to shake the islander's confidence; but, as quickly, came reassurance. The Theban veteran, as prearranged, was pouring a cup of wine for the harbor master. At that instant when the Cretan officer's forked beard tilted back in the act of drinking, Conon, with one swift thrust, drove a double-edged dagger up to its hilt into the exposed throat. At the same moment Cleon helped secure the spasmodically jerking body in his arms and hurriedly eased it out of sight beneath a tarpaulin left ready for the purpose.

"Oh-h-h, Artemis!"

Only subconsciously did Lysander notice the rush of Kyria's sharply indrawn breath and her half strangled exclamation; his whole attention was centered upon that pale stretch of beach just beyond the Persepone's bows. When her keel grated softly on the sand, the islanders went quickly and surely into action.

"Brisk now, overboard, you bow men, and swing her about!"

Half the crew hurriedly began pulling on their armor, while the fifteen bow-most rowers, who were already accoutered, leaped into the knee deep water and, pushing strongly, turned the Persepone's prow back towards the canal.

To Lysander's chagrin, the palace's outward appearance was not at all as he had pictured the edifice in his imagination. True, there *were* doors and gates w h e r e his memorized ground plan had called for entrances, but these

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portals were quite different in size and design from what he had expected.

Without command, six islanders went running back along the canal wall on their all-important mission of seizing the water gate. In equal silence and speed the remaining raiders formed up into three groups. Kyria alone seemed at a loss what to do, but appeared anxious to join Lysander's party. The islander, his features now half hidden beneath the nose and cheek pieces of his plain Corinthian helmet, signaled her sharply to the right.

"Go with Cleon as I told you!" he hissed, then, at a quick trot, led his detachment towards a tall door which, tinted yellow and green-blue, counterfeited palm trunks skillfully joined. This he knew must lead to the very heart of the palace.

BETRAYED by only a faint clinking of armor and the occasional flash of a naked sword blade, Conon's group hurried off through a garden gate to the left. The tough old Theban veteran ran first of them all—the very incarnation of impending doom. Three strides behind the King of Chios ran a youth called Damon, a conch shell trumpet slatting over his hip.

Terribly conscious of the patter of his own and his companion's feet, Lysander approached the palm trunk door and experienced a mad thrill of excitement when the portal gave to his first push. Promptly the music of harp, lyre, and tinkling finger cymbals sounded louder, distant voices could be heard singing in accompaniment to that seductive stringed instrument the *raita*—better known as "Pan's lyre."

The heady perfumes of sandalwood, jasmine, and orange blossom grew sharper in the cool air within, but the only living thing the invaders encountered was a large macaque monkey with a jeweled collar. It chattered impudently from its perch on an alabaster balustrade, but remained looking down with sad, liquid eyes. Beside the ape, the grim little column met sundry other domestic animals, a pair of magnificent Mongolian pheasants, a macaw, and even a pair of stately flamingoes. These last were wandering down a long, shrouded colonnade.

In powerful strides he in the antique armor mounted a broad set of black marble steps, hurriedly trampling a gossamer scarf of flaming vermilion carelessly dropped by someone.

"Surely this must be Olympus, home of the gods," gasped young Damon, his eyes round with amazement. Breathless little exclamations kept bursting from the lips of the big warriors at Lysander's heels.

Before the raiders now loomed a dim hall, seeming absolutely immense because only a few bronze lamps were burning. Nevertheless their rich amber light revealed silken divans, splendid as the colors of Aurora herself, delicate tapestries from far off Cathay, and screens of alabaster so cunningly carved that they seemed fashioned of paper rather than cold, translucent stone.

A pair of coal black Persian cats, lazing beside a small fountain, merely turned their regal heads in supercilious curiosity when the sunburned column came surging into their domain.

"Which way, my lord?" hoarsely demanded a big ex-fisherman.

Lysander had halted to recall the ground plan he had so often traced on the sand beaches of Chios.

"We must be almost there," he replied, peering quickly about. "Steady now, till I make sure."

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Yes. He knew now—that door to the right should, if the Ephesian hadn't lied, lead to the women's quarters. That passage on his left must be the one which should take him to his immediate goal—Mazaeus' zenana and the trophy room where King Philo's signet lay as proof of Chios' conquest.

"Holy Anubis!"

Lysander spun about to see a huge, flabby eunuch, black as the Styx itself, goggling at the invaders' invasion from behind a hanging of emerald silk. Promptly the arm of Clitus swung back like the beam of a catapult, then his body bent in a sudden forward sweep which sent a javelin flashing across the great hall like an embodied thunderbolt. With scarcely a sound the eunuch collapsed.

"Ha! Hear that?"

A clatter of arms ending in a strangled shout from the left revealed that Cleon's party, too, had encountered some other member of the satrap's household.

Decidedly, events were moving faster now!

NO doubt running to investigate, a swarthy man in light armor appeared at the entrance to Mazaeus' quarters; his red and black painted helmet identified him as a member of the satrap's Median guards. Paralyzed with astonishment, the Asiatic halted a brief instant, then turning, ran for dear life back down the passage, shouting the alarm.

"Kill that man—shut him up!" Lysander yelled.

Two islanders ran forward in what seemed to be vain pursuit, but before the runners were really in stride the great hall resounded to a sharp humming noise like that of a harp string strongly pulled. Something flashed between the pursuers and then the fleeing guard seemed suddenly to trip. He flung arms wildly towards the fantastically decorated ceiling before he fell heavily onto his face with a red feathered arrow sprouting from the base of his neck.

"Good shot! I'll remember it!" Lysander cried and dashed past the fallen palace guard who, against the base of a lovely door of bronze tracery, was still twisting in his last death throes.

That the Persians were finally taking alarm now became evident. Startled shouts and sharp queries could be heard ringing down the palace's amazingly long corridors. Which door was for the trophy room?

Fingers sweaty and trembling with excitement, Lysander wrenched open a scarlet painted door upon which a sun of massive gold flamed like a true replica of its original. Beyond was a small bedchamber! Was he lost in this labyrinth of a palace?

The second portal he examined merely led to a passageway; so, cold with anxiety, he tried another door that was green as the sea and marked with a dolphin done in silver. One glance told him he had found the right one at last.

"Halt! How dare you enter the—" In the trophy room sat a single shaven-headed Egyptian clerk, so busy writing by the light of a rush lamp that several seconds passed before he finally looked up to behold those menacing figures in the doorway. He had just time to utter a fear choked squeal before he collapsed over his papyrus scrolls with an Ionian dart transfixing his chest.

Splendor such as the simple islanders had never dreamt to exist momentarily awed and dazzled them into immobility. Lysander was the first to re-

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cover and, his feet muffled by a carpet that seemed inches deep, ran over to examine a small iron chest standing upon the desk.

Someone brushed by him, and when he saw who it was he uttered an exasperated snarl. "You here?"

It was Kyria; bow slung over her right shoulder and eager to join the other invaders in a furious pillaging of the trophy room.

"Look, my lord, look! Am I dreaming?"

A stalwart peasant youth could not suppress his yell of triumph when gleaming gold coins poured in a flood from the coffer he had upset. Into his patched woolen cloak the youth began to rake double handfuls of heavy gold pieces.

"Don't try to carry too much," Lysander cautioned, then pursued his quest until he came upon a crystal case containing five or six signet rings. Without difficulty he recognized the beautifully wrought trout and trident design of his father's ring and, smashing the case, had the heavy gold band on his finger in an instant.

Kyria, her eyes become simply enormous, was beckoning frantically.

"Here, Lysander, here! See what I've found!" Laughing wildly, she was holding out a small gold and ivory casket; filling it to the brim, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies gleamed like imprisoned rainbows.

"Help yourself!" Lysander exulted. "There's plenty for all of us!"

Then it seemed the old queen's voice spoke in his ear, warning him to control himself; so he made a swift survey of the room. Amazing how quickly the ordered luxury of Mazaeus' library had been shattered. There was need for leadership—not a man of the raiders but was drunk with treasure lust and babbling in incoherent triumph over some precious piece of plunder. "That's enough—we must go now."

Very unwillingly the men of Chios obeyed—but they went, Kyria among the first. The lamp on the desk was upset.

Quickly, a tiny yellow flame licked out at the edge of a papyrus scroll—it took hold, then flared bright.

In terrible eagerness the fire spread to another scroll and another; soon brilliant flames were lighting the trophy room.

"Come! The palace is full of armed men," Kyria cried. "We'll have hard fighting to get out!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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Goblin Trail

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Magee of the Mounted," "Shaman's Trail," etc.

Long Novelette

Corporal Dougherty of the Mounted, trailing a murderer, encounters a weird drama of the Northland

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CHAPTER I.

WEETIGO!

THE day was clear and cold. It was February, and the sun had come back. Spring had set its promise in the sky, but the grip of winter was still viced upon the land, the lakes, the rivers, and the sea of the Northwestern wilderness.

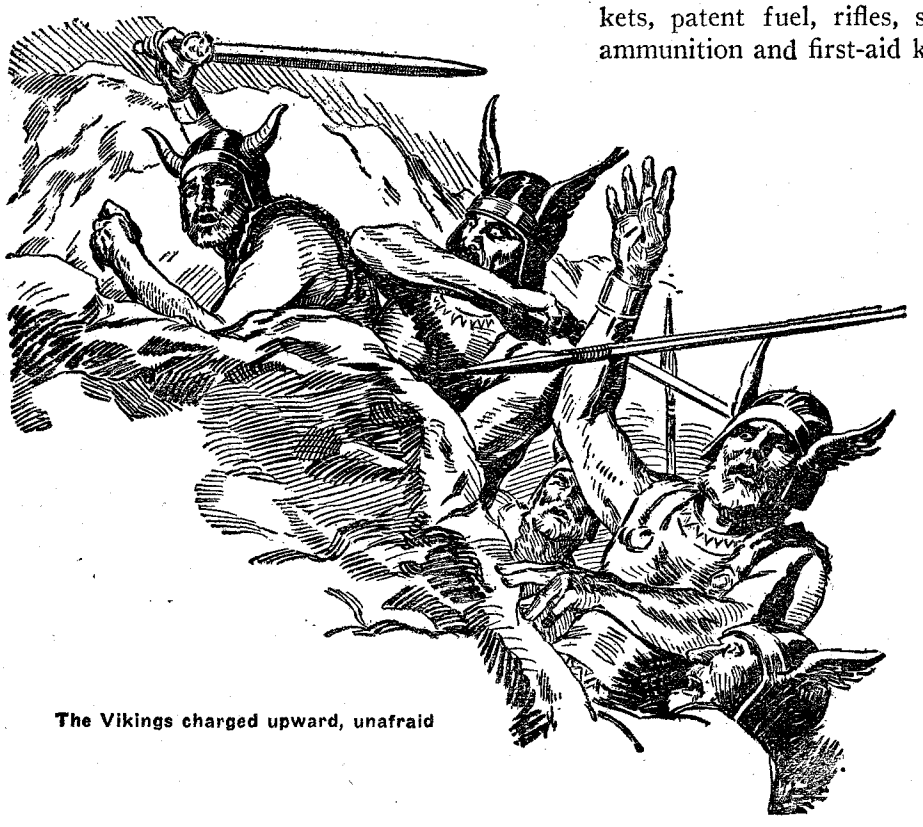
Winter storms had piled the snow into high drifts, the cores of which were frozen hard. Loose crystals, granular and gritty as sand, were blown from the crests like spray before the wind.

The landscape was actually like a foaming sea, frozen suddenly during a storm, the waves upcurling.

Corporal Jimmy Dougherty was on grand patrol. It was literally hard sledding for him, for Ooingoot, his musher and interpreter, special constable to the detachment, and for the seven post-bred huskies. Twenty-five miles was a good day's journey under these conditions.

At fifty below, in such weather, a man may see as far with his naked eyes as he would through lenses where it is fifty above. The sense of hearing becomes acute. You can hear a caribou walking a mile away, the strokes of an ax at ten miles.

Dougherty was ahead of the Mackenzie River toboggan sleigh, Ooingoot bringing up the rear. The sleigh carried frozen fish for the dogs, two pounds a day for each; pemmican and beans in canvas skins; fat bacon and tea, blankets, patent fuel, rifles, spare ammunition and first-aid kit.



The Vikings charged upward, unafraid

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There was also some undelivered mail. The trails were closed, now that the aëroplanes were flying the mail, and the Mounties acted as postmen on occasions like this to all those distant from the airmail stations.

There were medicines to leave or administer, emergency supplies for needy cases, certain gifts for Eskimos and Chippewyans in their scattered villages; things that they craved; tobacco, teaballs, small tins of molasses, sugar and biscuits.

Six hundred pounds of total cargo for the *komatik*, or sleigh. On this habitual patrol it was Dougherty's duty to keep in touch with trappers, traders and prospectors. He was to inform traders, trappers and Indians of the recent changes in the N. W. Game Act. To look for any destitution or sickness. To amend the census, settle disputes, lecture the natives against making brew. To fill in time by shooting wolves that, breeding in the muskeg and tundra, were multiplying at a rate that threatened the extinction of wild game despite the liberal bounty offered.

Eskimos and Chippewyans were getting lazy, government-spoiled. The traders would advance no more debt because the natives made little attempt at trapping, even at supplying themselves with meat and fish for the winter. They preferred to take government rations, to consider themselves on dole.

Dougherty was to report on that condition, to warn them that they would get nothing but the barest necessities if they acted in such fashion. There would be no gramophones, no sewing machines, or accordions. Eskimos all had the vice of begging implanted in them. It had to be eradicated for their own good.

Jimmy Dougherty was his own general. He had to sit in judgment, make decisions, assume all sorts of responsibilities. He was the Law.

The Mackenzie District was never famous for caribou. He had seen no signs of a herd on the patrol, now two-thirds over. This was a land of fish and rabbits, ptarmigan and a few moose; with their natural enemies, wolf, wolverine and fox.

Dougherty thought about these matters, already assembling them for the report he must make when he got back to the detachment.

He topped a rise and stood on a fairly level stretch, watching the dogs come over the crest; Dancer in the lead, grinning at him.

The dogs were all shod with canvas kumiks, their bodies gave off clouds of vapor.

Dougherty was beginning to sweat. He loosened the belt over his two outer coats, loosened them at the neck, and let cool air flow through. The sleigh rolled over the rise, and then came Ooingoot, with his long whip, a forty-foot lash of twisted hide and sinew, with which he could have cut out a dog's eye, or cut off its ear, at full range.

But Ooingoot was not an Indian. Eskimos did not beat their huskies, even to make a dashing entrance into a village.

Dougherty was six feet, but the shadow of Ooingoot, cast upon the snow beside that of the corporal, was almost the same length. Yet he was little over the average height of his tribesmen.

Dougherty considered a smoke. The huskies had snatched the chance to lie down.

They curled up, brushes over muzzles, panting to assist their own scanty body sweat.

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To the north and east were stands of spruce, some on big hummocks, some on natural ridges, others surrounding frozen little lakes, solid with ice save where living springs oozed sluggishly.

The nearer trees were vivid green. The farther ones seemed painted with a brush dipped in pure cobalt in the sun, rich indigo in shadow.

THERE were low hills, fading into illimitable distance, in the same direction. Here was the true virgin wilderness, uncharted and unknown, white spaces on the maps, where speculative streams and lakes were indicated by dots.

Between the billows of snow and ice there was little wind. It blew with lusty vigor on the little flat; straight from the Beaufort Sea, beyond Cape Bathurst and Cape Barry; born in the Arctic Ocean, bred at the Pole itself.

There were two known rivers bounding this region of mystery—the Anderson and the Coppermine. Between them lay barren wastes, the *limbo* of the natives; a land of legend, the dwelling-place of ghosts and goblins.

The wind now brought a sound, faint but clear, that had nothing to do with the soft hiss of snowgrains, the sough in the trees like far-away surf, all blending indistinguishably into the Arctic silence. Both men heard it at the same instant. Ooingoot knew, and the corporal shrewdly guessed, what that distant sound portended.

Tom-tom-tom-tom-tum! Tom-tom-tom-tom-tum!
Tumpity-tup-tup-tup-tup-tup-tup TOM!
Tom-tom-tom . . .

Drums, Indian drums! There was an Athabascan tribe beyond Thunder River. Chippewyans. Dougherty had set it for his next call. By pushing on he might have made it by nightfall, but he was not keen on spending a night in, or about, a Chippewyan encampment. Their lodges were filthy, their dogs a pest.

But now it was imperative to get there. That broken, emphasized rhythm meant only one thing. Trouble!

Ooingoot expressed it in two words. One Eskimo, one Chippewyan. *"Aporjok."* Literally meaning "is bad," *"Weetigo."*

Chippewyan is not too hard to learn, but Eskimo baffles most white men. In the course of a day of ordinary conversation five to ten thousand words may be used. The inflections are an unending puzzle. There is a universal compromise of Mackenzie "pidgin," a blend of contributions from the French-Canadians, from whalers who have brought with them South Sea beach-talk; a jargon of dialects, in which English is predominant. It is the trade language of the Northwest, and all men speak it.

Dougherty, who spoke French as well as he did English, from sheer necessity, studied Eskimo and Athabascan. He knew the meaning of *aporjok*. Also of *weetigo*, though that was more complex. And his eyes narrowed, his jaws tightened until little bosses of muscle stood out, beading their lean, Celtic curves.

Weetigo was the ancient Indian practice of exorcising evil spirits, and many atrocities were committed by the medicine-men in the extraordinary rites. Men, women and children starved to death, because the hunters were afraid to venture forth. Those who seemed stricken by the evil demons were treated with horrible cruelty. It was believed that such evil possession came from the

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curses of goblins who had caused their ancestors to become cannibals.

The Eskimos have no true gods, though they believe there is true life in everything—the rock, the lightning, the tree, the rain. All events are controlled by spirits, good or evil. Anyone may command these who knows the rituals, possesses the proper drums; though shamanism, or wizardry, is generally considered hereditary.

THE Indians are even more pagan. Under the influence of the medicine-man the chief may defy authority. The tribe goes mad, like dogs afflicted with hydrophobia. And the disease is spread by the "Moccasin-telegraph," infectious as the plague.

An attack of influenza might have brought on the *weetigo*. It might be something more sinister. Whatever the cause, it was up to Dougherty to stamp it out; one white man against perhaps two hundred frenzied tribesmen.

"Get going," he snapped. "You know where Thunder River can be crossed?"

Ooingoot grunted assent. Rivers were good traveling at times, but not at others. Sometimes freezing conditions left no ice beneath the snow crust, only the current, that did not freeze.

Thunder River was treacherous. It was fed with springs and some of these were hot ones. It was said to rise in the land of the Thunder God. Its course had shifted through the years. That was from earthquake, but the Eskimos did not seem to comprehend that as anything apart from thunder. It was *aporjok*.

Ooingoot took the lead. Dougherty did not take over the whip. The dogs trailed Ooingoot because they held affection for him. He fed them, groomed them. Dougherty had brought them through distemper, but that did not count against the daily care.

They followed their own leader mainly because they hated him, and always hoped they might overhaul him and get him down. There was constant enmity among them that their masters utilized. The leader had won his place by ability to fight any one of them, and win, and by virtue of his intelligence and strength. He could set the pace. Dancer could weave in and out, slashing, dodging, twisting; and better than a wolf.

Nor was he afraid of wolves. The sound or scent of a pack would set the rest of the team barking, more for defense than true defiance. Dancer only growled deep in his throat, eager for combat.

They came to the gorge of Thunder River, and descended into it. Ooingoot had cut a long pole and prodded through the snow. Four times it lanced through to black, rushing water before they crossed on a bridge of ice.

It was Dancer who sought to lead them aside, persisting until Ooingoot suggested he should have his way.

"He savvy something *aporjok*. This time plenty no good spirits walk along this place." The drums had never ceased.

HOUR after hour, the refrain had been maintained by relays of drummers, acolytes of the medicine-man, warding off the evil ghosts and goblins, while the wizards made their incantations for the favor of more powerful spirits.

The vibrations throbbed until they became one with the beat of their pulses, with the pulses of their dogs.

Ooingoot snowshoed alongside the

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panting Dancer. Then he shouted to the team, imperatively. He unleashed his whip, and sent it menacingly above them. Dougherty braked on the gee-pole.

They had come to the edge of spruce, a thin grove that grew on the spine of a low line of hills.

Bound upright to the tree was a hideous thing. A naked Chippewyan, stark and stiff in death.

He was terribly wasted from illness, from lack of nourishment. His face was like that of a mummy, the teeth showing horribly through shrunken lips. The eyes were opaque balls of tissue, but they seemed to reflect horror, agony.

Ooingoot turned upon the howling dogs, flogging the air, so close above them it stirred their fur.

"They tied him up like this, left him here to die?" Jimmy asked his musher.

"All same. They think evil spirit in him no come back to village. Maybe he dead when they bring him this place—maybe no dead. I think he die, anyway. Look like he been plenty sick. No can help, no can do."

It was true enough. They could not bury the poor devil who had been thought possessed of a devil, and so held as unclean, in the frozen ground. The wolves might give him sepulture. But he might have been murdered, even though disease had doomed him. There might be others who would soon share his plight.

"Get on," ordered Dougherty.

The village was one of lodges made from interwoven willows covered with hides. It lacked all sanitation. It was only when official interference made them shift the site of a lodge that they moved from where they had slept, eaten and digested, month after month. Only the cold kept them from dysentery.

Scores of dogs, pegged, Indian-fashion, with sticks close to their collars, so they could not chew through their leashes, howled in a dismal chorus to the drums. The fur of the post huskies lifted with their muzzles. They wanted to join the chant of death.

Ooingoot shouted at them, cracked his whip. Partly because they despised all Indian-bred curs, hating the stink of them, they subsided, curled up, affecting to ignore everything, though they quivered to the throbbing tom-toms.

The drums were being beaten in the main lodge. Above it, smoke pulsed and glowed from the floor-fire, escaping through a hole in the roof. Now voices chimed in with the drums.

"Hi-yah! Oh, hi-yah-hee-yah-hi-yah!"

Ooingoot took Dougherty gently by the elbow, turning him slightly. The corporal felt for his Colt, freed it.

Two young braves were hauling on a cord drawn through the side of a wigwam. They dragged at it like automatons, tranced by the rhythm of the drums. They seemed in a daze, pulling the rope to a jerking limit. Then something braked it.

"Medicine-man tell them do that while drum beat," said Ooingoot. "I savvy other end of rope. That round someone neck. Long time dead, I think. But maybe evil spirit still in body. So they want to drive-um out."

DOUGHERTY told the two young braves to drop the rope, without effect. Their eyes lacked luster under the aurora's light. They were like resurrected corpses, even under the threat of his gun, until he clipped first one, and then the other, on the point of the jaw.

They were close to exhaustion, what with the delirium of ritual and the

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actual toil of their grisly task. They had been at it for hours, after fasting.

The wigwam entrance was closed by hides. Dougherty flashed the beam of his flashlight, thankful for modern miracles in this abode of wizardry.

Inside there was a squaw, the cord tight about her neck. No doubt that she had raved in the madness of her fever, talked of devils, of ghosts and goblins.

The medicine-man had determined to make her an example. To show to the evil ones, through her, that they must leave.

There was a change in the rhythm of the drums.

"Medicine-man come look now," said Ooingoot. "*Aporjok!*"

Dougherty was ready for it. He turned to meet the wizard and the warriors by the light of the aurora, Colt in hand.

They saw the two braves he had knocked out. And then they saw his sleigh, his dogs, Ooingoot, and himself.

Their throats were instantly raucous with bellowed rage. The medicine-man, bedecked with skins, masked like a bear, leaped forward; checked by the cold light on the blue barrel of the Mountie's gun.

He was a wizard, who dealt with the Powers of Darkness, whose lore extended back through many generations of barbaric ritual.

Behind him stood the Chief. Back of him, excited, itching warriors.

"You can't do this sort of thing," declared Dougherty. "It's against the law. It's murder. You can swing for it. Tell them that, Ooingoot."

Gutturals countered each other. Then the Chief spoke.

"White man keep out of this. White man no savvy. We kill Evil-One. You no go, we kill you all the same."

Dougherty laughed at them. It was not a forced laugh, but genuine Celtic mirth, based on authority. Such laughter has ruled millions.

"I am redcoat," he said. "You savvy redcoat? You kill me, more redcoat come all time. *Too* many come. Great White Father, *Gitchee Ogemow,* he send plenty redcoat. Follow trail all time. Get their man. You savvy that? Get *all* your men. All swing. Bimeby, tribe forgotten. All gone."

There was a forward surge, a shuffling, and a final halt.

"You go first of all," Dougherty told the medicine-man. "Tell him that in his own tongue, Ooingoot."

"He savvy that, plenty," said the special constable with cold contempt. His race had ever despised Athabascans. They had invaded their land from the sea, and if it were not that Eskimos hate to live in the forests the Chippewyans, Dogribs, Slaveys, Hares, Beavers, and Yellowknives would long ago have been exterminated.

Now the white man had decreed peace and maintained it; but that did not wipe out the racial hates and balances.

Nanacho, the Chippewyan wizard, squinted at the muzzle of the Colt, his soul beginning to squirm. In the depths of it he knew his magic would not prevail against that of the corporal. The old times had gone. But he wanted to save his own face.

"Plenty sick, *too much* sick," he grunted. "White man no come. But Evil-One come, from way back of Keenowyak. Bring too much trouble. Take too much fish. One, two, see him. Him devil tall as tree. He no see *them.* But he see one man, one squaw; make them too much sick. We no got white-man-magic. So, all-same, we try Injun magic. Now *you* come, *you* fix."

He was cowed, but there was doubt

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and a hint of derision in his voice. He had been upset with some mysterious sickness, probably due to their own neglect of filth. It was coupled up with the story of a devil. Now Nanacho was glad to shift the burden to the white

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man. Though he knew well enough there was going to be trouble. He, the Chief, the two young men who had strangled the woman, whoever could be proven implicated in the death of the man tied to the tree, would have to answer for it to white man's justice.

That was why the Chief had put up the bluff the redcoat officer had laughed at. But it was a good idea to draw a smelly fish across that trail. To talk up the Evil-One, the stolen fish, the sickness, to put the immediate problems up to the corporal.

"If it was a devil," asked Dougherty, "why would it need fish?"

"That I no can tell. Maybe the dogs were *not* devils. But they left no trail. No track of *komatik*, of moccasin. The Evil-One go north, back other side of Keenowyak. That place where devils live. Now white man give us wise talk."

Dougherty passed over the sarcasm. This was his job. To accept any and all responsibilities. The tribal killings could wait. Nanacho and his tribe would not run away. There was no place for them to run, to hide.

"We make *powwow* in Big Lodge," he said. "You bring ones who say they saw this devil. Ooingoot, look out for the dogs, and then report to me."

Ooingoot saluted. The gesture had its effect. The Indians looked up to the Eskimo. If Ooingoot made obeisance to the white man, who was the official representative of the King, of *Gitchee Ogemow*, the Great White Father, it was well to listen, with ears close to the ground.

CHAPTER II.

MORE MURDER.

NANACHO drew a crude map on the dirt floor of the Medicine Lodge with a pointed stick. He showed the two big rivers. He indicated the coast of the Arctic Ocean, and sketched in a suggestion of Banks and Victoria Islands. He stuck in the point of his stylus, and said that there was Keenowyak. Back of Keenowyak, it appeared, was a land of magic, of death and mystery. A place of ghosts and ghouls and goblins. Spirits and devils owned it, and killed and devoured all who came too near.

It was a land where the waters ran hot, where great fountains spouted, roaring, into the air and turned to pillars of fire by night. There the earth shook and trembled. Human beings were choked by the breath of the goblins. None had ever returned from that place.

Some had been seen and heard from

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afar. Others had been revealed to the wizards in their trances. It was the Back of Beyond, the *po-ele-ele* of the South Sea islanders, a place of Oblivion for all humans who dared approach it.

A land of fire and water, where strange trees grew, where there was green grass and herds of enormous moose and caribou, of giant bears, and great creatures like moving mountains, whose horns came out of their mouths, like the tusks of walrus; creatures vaster than a whale would be if it had legs.

Eerie forms—the forms of devils—walked like shadows. To warm themselves they set the world on fire. There was no snow, no ice. An Indian Inferno.

Dougherty let Nanacho talk with Ooingoot, and the special-constable translated. This loosened Nanacho's tongue.

"What does Keenowyak mean?" the corporal asked his musher.

"It means 'Like-a-Face.' It is a great rock that looks like the face of a devil. Nanacho says the devils carved it to warn humans to stay away."

"Mighty considerate, for devils. How about it? Did you ever hear of such a place, Ooingoot?"

Ooingoot nodded gravely. "I have often heard of it," he said. "From my own people. It is a tale that has been told in every generation. There is, no doubt, some truth in it."

Ooingoot would not commit himself as to how deep was his own belief in this mysterious realm, obscured by myth and legend.

It sounded to Dougherty closely allied with the legends of the Alaskan Indians, whose tyees and shamans told of magicians who could change their forms at will, who played grisly games of ball with the heads of their victims. Such sagas were usually mingled with geological and geographical phenomena. Linked up with such things as the birth of a burning isle in the Aleutians, or the death of one.

Dougherty knew there was coal in this region, plenty of oil. There was a spout of burning natural gas on the Mackenzie River. All this region had once been volcanic, then tropical. Was it possible that some spot remained where subterranean fury still manifested itself; where mammoths roamed, geysers hissed, and craters flamed, between earthquakes?

If so, what of the devils, the forms of men? Was this the remnant of a race, beleagured by frozen sea and tundra, or content to possess the place they were used to, with its warmth, its strange trees and game?

It was interesting speculation, but it was not part of his duty, or so it seemed. The whole thing was, of course, grossly exaggerated. Brought down through the years, each generation must have added to it. The shamans and medicine-men found it a convenient location for the spirits they claimed to control.

The two hunters lied, to make themselves out brave, to make themselves conspicuous. No credence could be given them, beyond the fact that they might have seen someone stealing frozen fish. Unless they had done it themselves. But the Chief and the medicine-man would look out for that.

The wind was the cause for the lack of tracks in that dry snow.

If Dougherty had listened long enough the thief's five dogs would have become fifty, they would all have vanished, flying, in a cloud of smoke.

He looked at the others who were sick in the village, using a clinical ther-

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mometer. It was not hard to determine. They had been eating tinned salmon and corned-beef. Ooingoot found the tins. Cold as it was, the contents were spoiled. The tins had been opened and kept in one of the filthy lodges, where the temperature was kept above seventy.

THE consequence had been ptomaine poisoning. Dougherty had a hunch that some of the young hunters had robbed a cache, a major crime in the Northwest. To prove it was another matter. But if they had acquired the stuff legitimately through trade they would have eaten it long before the winter was past Christmas.

"It may be," he said, "that this meat was stolen. I do not say so, but *if* so it might have brought sickness. Also, it is the part of a fool to keep this meat and fish in a tin. That you have been told many times. Now I shall talk with your medicine-man, and we will settle what is best for you."

That saved Nanacho's face. He could administer the white man's treatment as part of his own, take the credit where there was recovery, blame the corporal where there was not.

Dougherty gave him Dover's pills for the two worst cases; told him to see that the others got flour-gravy for their intestinal tracts, quinine for their fever, a cathartic to discourage the amœba. He knew they had enormous powers of resistance, unless they were weakened by a superstitious belief that they were doomed by devils. Medicine *had* to be strong. Then they believed in it.

It was night now, and they must stay in the village, or lose prestige. Both Dougherty and Ooingoot said that they had eaten, and went to sleep fasting, leaving early.

Nanacho was about, with the Chief, both uneasy about the exposure and the strangling. They dared not refer to it, and Dougherty did not. He had to finish his patrol. He would report the deaths to Ottawa, and await action from headquarters.

He was allowed to assume plenty of responsibility, but he was supposed to use plenty of discretion if he wished promotion.

The patients were better. Nanacho himself had administered the medicine. He seemed grateful, for a Chippewyan.

"This I say," he told Dougherty at parting. "Do not go to Keenowyak. White magic is strong magic. But these are too many. They are ghosts, and *no can* die. No use for try shoot um. You go that place, you no come back."

Dougherty had a notion that Nanacho might be well enough pleased at such a solution to his own troubles. He was the one who would be finally held responsible for his manner of driving out the sickness with *weetigo*. The Chief might be sentenced equally, for the sake of example, and though justice might be tempered with mercy, the best they could hope for would be long terms of penitentiary imprisonment. Indians do not serve out long terms.

They soon die in captivity.

THE crafty Nanacho might be trying to urge the corporal on to what he felt would be certain death.

Dougherty and Ooingoot left the village behind without regret. Out of sight of it they made a good meal. Dougherty figured to reach the cabin of Regnier, a French-Canadian trapper, at the end of that day's trek. Regnier was getting along in years, but he was still strong and able, one of the few men

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who not only understood his business, but worked hard at it.

It was said that he had money enough cached in his cabin, and in the safes of trading posts, to have long ago taken him "outside," but Regnier did not want to go. He might come into a settlement when he got too stiff to follow his hundred-mile trapline, but he would never leave the Northwest, never go below "sixty" latitude.

He worked alone, lived alone, with two huskies, sons of the sons of those he had first brought in. They were sure of a fine supper with the old *attrapeur*.

The fine weather held, the dogs went well, and made a record for the trip. But dusk had fallen when they struck the stream that flowed by Regnier's *cabane*. That was set in a ravine, built up against a cavern that Regnier used as storeroom for his supplies and pelts. Trees grew thickly all about the place, and made for a gloomy trail.

There were no shadows. The forest was all shadow, drenched in purple, as if seen through glasses of that hue. Even the patches of snow beneath the trees were tinged with it. Such effects were nothing new to either the corporal or the constable, but tonight there seemed something different. It was not the silence, which was supreme, the only sounds the squeak of the surface under the sleigh or the creak of leather harness.

There was a feeling both of them shared, a feeling born within rather than transferred through the five senses. An atmosphere of oppression to the spirit, an impression that the silence would soon be broken, that somewhere, close by, tragedy was impending, or had occurred.

The visibility slowly but steadily lessened. On the open tundra the light would not actually fail for three or four hours, but here in the woods, following the course of the frozen stream, the effect was that of a stage set for melodrama.

Suddenly there came a howl from the right, echoed, it seemed, from the left. These were repeated, added to. Dancer gave a defiant bark. The other huskies yapped, and then were silent.

The howls multiplied. Ooingoot, who had been trailing, came up with the sleigh. He cracked his whip and shouted an order that the dogs obeyed reluctantly. They knew well enough that if they were attacked in harness as they ran the wolf pack might get the better of them in short order, but they did not like the idea of awaiting the attack. They had wolf enough in themselves to know what chance they would have against heavy odds. They still could fight like wolves, leaping in for the slash, their jaws snapping in rapid bites so that when they missed the teeth sounded like castanets.

But they had faith in the two-legged gods that mastered them, fed them, would defend them. They halted and grouped, their own quarrels forgotten, barking harsh challenge that changed to a steady snarling.

DOUGHERTY slid out his rifle from the lashings of the sleigh. He had learned a good deal about wolves. He knew that they were at once fierce, dangerous and cowardly. A wolf in a trap, in a pit, or even a pen, loses all courage. They are purely pack attackers, and even then are the most suspicious of any animal.

But in years like the present one, with wolves in ever increasing numbers and game decreasing from various causes, they came close to being desperate.

These wolves were ranging. Dough-

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erty doubted if they had deliberately stalked the sleigh, after sighting or smelling it. But they knew that here was *meat*. If they found nothing else they would attack. Fire would hold them off, if necessary. A pack would close in on a lone man, trailing him for days with bestial cunning, wearing down his resistance. But two men could spell each other.

The thing to do, of course, was to reach Regnier's *cabane,* now fairly close at hand. Dougherty wondered what had brought the wolves into the wood, aside from themselves. There had been no sign of moose or caribou. A pack meant definite objective.

Ooingoot uncoiled a length of rope, to let it trail back of the sleigh. Arctic wolves could not think it a snake, but it would hold off a rear attack, as it glided over the uneven ground, a strange object that seemed to have life.

Dancer changed from snarl to bark again. Dougherty saw the gleam of eyes. He saw a furry, slinking form moving amid the trees with a strange, sliding, effortless gait. There was a third, that threw up its head and watched the sleigh with twitching nostrils.

Dougherty jacked a cartridge to the loading gate, raised his rifle, sighting swiftly, squeezing the trigger. His movements were as effortless as those of the wolves. Precise.

Flames spurted in the purple gloom. A wolf yipped, flung itself off the ground, dropped to the snow, choking, convulsed, collapsing. A second dropped, dragging helpless hind legs behind it. The eyes were gone. The howling ceased.

To the left and right and rear, the brutes had slunk off. But not far away.

"We'll get along," said Dougherty. "What brought them into the woods, Ooingoot? Nothing here but a few rabbits and ptarmigan, and they wouldn't get them this time of night. They were not trailing us?"

"No. Something else bring them here. There is something *aporjok* along this place."

Some credit Eskimos and Indians with second-sight. Not so the Mounties. But Dougherty realized that, if *he* had felt something wrong—or *aporjok*—through the perceptions of senses that civilization had modified in their faculties—forgotten glands, like the mitral valve of smell, the pineal eye—it was logical to credit natives living close to nature with livelier reactions.

THROUGH the snow-shrouded pyramids of the evergreens, the Northern Lights—the Dancers—were forming in their aërial saraband, quivering streamers advancing and retreating. Tonight the lights were silver-white and green, with hints of lemon. Palpitating colors, interweaving, paling the stars, faintly reflected on the snow as the dogs pulled out into the clearer ground of the ravine.

Outside the cabin the snow of the clearing was trampled and stained, smeared with spots and gouts of blood that showed vaguely red. This had been the arena of a fierce conflict.

Three dogs lay stark, their corpses frozen stiff as stone. Two were the huskies of Regnier, stout dogs, but, like their master, grown old. They had slowed down, their teeth were worn and blunted. But they had put up a battle. There was more blood than the three carcasses accounted for.

The third dog had been badly slashed, its throat torn. It was younger than the trapper's huskies, but it was thin. Its ribs stood up like a washboard. It might have been fed last night, but

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there had been many days and nights when it had gone hungry.

Ooingoot cast about for more sign while Dougherty went to the heavy door of the cabin. It was closed with a latch of wrought-iron, but the hasp used for the padlock was empty. If Regnier was away he would have left it fastened.

The corporal knew that Regnier was *here;* that this was the lure that had brought the wolf pack, the smell of blood drifting down the airlanes for miles, stale scent, perhaps, but unmistakable when they picked it up. And here was the tragedy that seemed brooding in the wood, as if a ghost lingered there, trying to make known its doleful story.

He waited until Ooingoot came back.

"One man. Snowshoes too much worn. Five dogs come, four dogs go with *komatik.* Two-three dogs bleed but go fast."

"Off for Keenowyak, I suppose," said Dougherty in bitter jest. He was sad for the fate he felt sure had overtaken the fine old trapper. And this looked to him mighty like a sequel to the stolen fish at Nanacho's village. "How long ago they go, Ooingoot?"

"One day, one night, I think. Mebbe li'l' more."

This tuned-in, too. Twenty-four hours' start. He had only four dogs, one or more wounded, but that did not count. What did was the fact that a light snow was beginning to sift down, small damp flakes that stuck together. The wind had fallen. Coming through the trees, Dougherty had missed its soughing in the boughs.

That snow would wipe out all trail inside of an hour.

"He go north," Ooingoot added laconically.

Now they heard the howling of the wolves once more, as if they timed with their eerie chorus the discovery of the two men.

THE huskies snarled. They were sniffing at the dead dogs, some of them licking the bloody snow.

"Better put 'em in the cave," suggested Dougherty. "I'll take a look-see first."

He entered the cabin, his flashlight searching out the disorder of the place. The clothes on the wide bunk had been hauled back over the side-boards. There was no sign of Regnier, but Dougherty felt no relief.

Hides curtained off the entrance to the cave, moved sluggishly to his action.

It was bitterly cold in the cabin, the fire in the stove and the one in the open fireplace long since gone out, the ashes cold. It was even colder in the cave.

OOINGOOT

At first Dougherty did not see Regnier's body. The ray showed where the trapper's supplies had been raided, cases broken into, their contents spilled where the thief had selected a full sleigh load.

But the peltry had not been touched.

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Fine skins of fox and mink, otter and beaver, of lynx and marten, light and very valuable, ideal loot for the usual Northland robber, had been left behind.

Then he saw Regnier's feet, clad in moosehide moccasins that had been beaded by some squaw as a gift, thrust out from behind a case. There was something about the feet, their attitude, their rigidity, that proclaimed death as eloquently as if a grisly voice had spoken.

There was a great bruise on Regnier's jaw, clean-shaven. Like most old-timers who spent their winter days on trap-lines, he did not wear a beard that would ice-up with his breath, freeze to the fur of his parka-hood.

His neck was broken. The vertebræ might have snapped from the tremendous blow that had also fractured his lower jaw, driven teeth into Regnier's tongue. A giant must have delivered it.

But there were other signs, more bruises on the neck. It looked as if the trapper must have been first struck, then clutched by the throat and, while out from the smash to the jaw, his spine had been broken by the fingers of a man with a monster's strength and a monster's mind.

Dougherty had once seen a dog's spine broken that way when it flew at the throat of an Eskimo of more than ordinary size, but never the spine of a man. It left him a bit sick. Regnier had never been given a chance. Old as he was, he would have put up a tough fight under ordinary conditions.

It looked as if he might have welcomed the killer, as lonely wilderness men will do, and so passed him by his dogs, who had afterwards attacked the stranger. Then he had set his own dogs on them, five to two.

Regnier might have taken him back in the cave to show him skins. He murdered first and looted afterwards, though the trapper must have been unconscious when he was wantonly murdered.

And what manner of man was it who had left rich pelts and even money as worthless, taken only weapons and ammunition? That was what a search disclosed. A crock had been taken down—thought perhaps to have contained cartridges. It had held part, at least, of Regnier's rumored hoard. The spilled contents showed bills and coins—gold and silver. In all, a little short of six hundred dollars.

Dougherty took charge of the money.

"We'll rest the dogs," he said, "and push on early to MacMurray's. He'll look out for things temporarily."

MacMURRAY was an independent trader whose "factory" was the farthest north except for those along the Mackenzie River. He and his son were well liked and trusted, even if MacMurray's liking for a bargain sometimes pinched a deal. Like all traders from the Hudson's Bay posts on, he carried coffins. Regnier's body would keep above-ground until communications opened and Dougherty heard from his division inspector, either at Atlavik or Fort Smith.

He would send out a runner with his report as soon as he finished patrol. On the quality of such reports depended promotions, but Dougherty was not thinking about that.

He wanted to get the murderer of his friend.

"The man who did this was a devil, right enough," he said.

"There are many men who have turned into devils," said Ooingoot, "but I have never heard of a devil who turned into a man. And this is surely a

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man, for the devil would not use racquettes."

"It's a wonder he didn't take Regnier's." But that question was solved by the finding of two pairs of snowshoe frames in presses, one partly restrung with new caribou sinews, the other waiting its turn. That was one of Regnier's winter chores after his pelts were all in, and his trapline abandoned for the season.

"So long as he's a man, even if he has the devil in him, we'll get him, Ooingoot, even if we have to go back of Keenowyak. How about it?"

Ooingoot was not over-keen about the idea, even if it were merely an idea; and he made no attempt to hide that; but he saluted briefly by the light of the lamps they had found and lit.

"I shall go where you go, so long I can keep on going," he replied.

"Good man," said Dougherty, and shook hands with him, knowing he would never have to doubt the special constable's loyalty. As for his courage, the corporal rated it higher than his own. If they had to go into the Back of Beyond he would not be handicapped, as would the Eskimo, with age-old superstition.

They placed the body of the trapper in his own bunk and fed the dogs before they brought them inside to the cave. The snow was still falling, blanketing all trail. The wolves had stopped howling. Snow covered scent and clogged it.

But when, in the first gray of early morning, they issued from the cabin the pack was there, haunched down in a semicircle, waiting, their tongues lolling, watchful. Here was meat, and meat they must have. The carcasses of the three dogs had disappeared, but the wolves were still hungry.

Dougherty stood in the doorway and took pleasure in emptying his rifle at them. They seemed half disposed to finish their meal on the first ones he dropped, but his aim was too fast and accurate. They melted away among the trees, dissolving in the dawn.

They would be back, presently, to their cannibalistic feast.

Dougherty saw that the shutters were secure at the windows. He had discovered the padlock, and he snapped it into place. He drew down the sheet-iron damper in the throat of the chimney. The idea of starving wolves coming down a chimney is not confined to the folktale of the Three Little Pigs.

So they set out for MacMurray's.

CHAPTER III.

THE EVIL ONE.

"'TIS sair news," said MacMurray gravely, "but I'm no entirely surprised. I paid but little attention to the first rumors, mind ye, for there's lots of talk made oot o' little i' the wilds. I wad ha' mentioned the veesit o' the mon to Regnier, o' coorse, when he brocht i' his furs, which he wad ha' done before the end o' the month. But it didna occur to me he was in peril."

Dougherty was used to MacMurray, and his roundabout method of speech. His manner of speaking was shared by many men who were more accustomed to linking things in thought rather than speech.

His son was a man of few words, an ever busy person in arranging stock, checking it, working on the trade accounts. His was less a sour disposition than a shy one. He stuttered, and was over-conscious of the defect. Yet he was an invaluable assistant to his father.

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"What were the rumors?" asked Dougherty.

MacMurray reflected, sipping at his hot toddy.

"I canna remember who first told me, noo. But the talk grew an' whiles a trapper wad come in an' corroborate the fac's. If they were fac's . . . " MacMurray loved a long word, and when it had more than one *r* in it, it sounded like a roll on a drum.

Dougherty refilled his pipe, lit it.

"It's the auld talk o' a 'wild man.' He's thocht to be daft, an' they tell o' him in connection wi' the disappearance of men who, like enough, ha' simply gone ootside. But it's a fac' that none traps north of Thunder River, though it's likely ground."

The corporal nodded. He had read of similar tales in the official reports of the R. C. M. P. Wilderness men, left to their own devices, limited to the extent of their own mentality, cut off from all society, deprived of sex, often went mad, and sometimes their mania turned homicidal. Often enough, when hunted down, with actual proof against them negligible, they turned out to be mild inmates of the institutions to which they were committed. It was the loneliness, the crackling aurora, the brooding silences of the Northwest, that had destroyed their mental balances. But they were liable to be dangerous.

"When this mon came to the factory I didna connect him wi' the talk. He seemed sane enough. His e'en were piercin', black as nicht, but they were no' fey. O' course, I ken such men ha' their spells. A big man, for a' his furs. He wanted to buy cartridges, an' that, mind ye, for different calibers."

"When was this?" asked Dougherty.

"Last Tuesday week. That's ten days ago. I mind the date, for Jamie was awa'. He'd left that morn'. Coortin'. Wi' my fu' consent, for were there a thousand lassies fra whom to pick an' choose, I'd approve his choice, e'en though she's American, but wi' guid Scotch bluid i' her veins."

Dougherty forbore to look at Jamie, whose face was redder than his hair. There was only one girl within a hundred miles who fitted that description.

Jane Carson! Her father was a relation of the famous scout, trapper, and mountaineer. The Scotch blood had come from her mother's side. In Daniel Carson's veins the blood had been still strongly tinctured with the yearning of his frontiersmen forebears. He had deserted the United States when motor traffic disturbed the ancient haunts of bear and beaver, migrated to Canada, bringing with him his daughter, Jane, then ten years old, and motherless, but knowing how to bait a trap, knowing wild flowers and herbs, knowing the birds, loving them all.

IN her was the urge of adventure, the challenge of the pioneer. She was a modern Diana, without the animus of the goddess against men. She saw few enough, though prospectors were forging into the region, new detachments being created to take care of discovery districts that seemed stable.

Jane Carson was still in the detachment of Jimmy Dougherty, and he was glad of it, though he saw her seldom. But she crept into his dreams. The sheer vitality of her, her laugh, the blood pulsing in her rounded cheeks, in her soft lips, disturbed him more than a corporal of the Mounted should be disturbed.

There had been moments when she had tempted him to renounce the Force, to throw in with Carson. She was lure and reward enough for any

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man. Unconscious of her beauty, save as a maid should be. Looking at Jimmy, in their brief meetings, with a gaze that betrayed her approval of him, not merely of his uniform and the way it fitted him, not only of his official dignity.

It would not be hard for any man to love Jane Carson. It would not be hard for women to fall in love with Jimmy Dougherty.

He had thrust those thoughts aside. He had duty to perform, not because it was sworn duty, but because he knew it was part of the building of an empire, the shaping of destiny. A man's job. And love softened a man.

No doubt Jamie MacMurray would make a faithful, loving husband; but Dougherty hardly placed him as the spouse of Jane Carson.

He did not slight Jamie as a man. But he had seen romance in Jane Carson's eyes, had listened to it in her voice as she sang, while she pumped the old harmonium Carson had brought in. Perhaps Jamie had it in him. After all, he was here in the wilderness, making good after his fashion. But it was hard for Dougherty to couple Jamie and Jane.

His thoughts were a bit cloudy, but he cleared his brain as MacMurray went on.

"He had somewhat o' an accent, to my mind, an' I asked him if he was a British subject. He wanted to ken what that had to do wi' it. I showed him, by the statute o' May, nineteen-thir-rty-thr-r-ee, that no alien may be i' possession o' any offensive weapon wi'oot a permit, or ha' ammunition for any firearms wi'oot a similar permit. He couldna' assure me o' bein' British, an' I was no' warm to the answers he gi'e me regardin' his need for different calibers. He glowered at me some, but he went oot meekly enough, after buyin' coffee, flour, bacon an' tobacco, payin' for it wi' American money. Eighteen dollars, it was, an' I think it was a' he had."

Dougherty, drawing on his pipe, put that information to the fact of the spilled money in Regnier's cabin. It did not quite fit. But he did not discard the connection entirely.

Jamie broke in, stuttering painfully in his earnestness.

"I'm w-w-wonderin'. Jane said they'd b-b-b-ring i' their p-p-elts richt awa'. I've been expectin' them for twa nichts. You ken that, feyther."

MacMurray nodded. "I'll no deny I've been wonderin', an' a wee worried, for yesterday was Daniel Carson's birthday, an' also mine. 'Tis the first time in years we've failed to celebrate it together. O' course it was snowin', there's a hundred things micht prevent, but Carson's no the one to let the ordinar' prevent a guid time."

Dougherty bit hard on the stem of his pipe. Carson's was the high point of his patrol. He had mail for them, and had looked forward to the delivery.

WHAT if the wild man, trailing north, had met Carson and his daughter, coveted their dogs, held them up? What if he had been stirred in his brutish mind by the youth and beauty of the girl?

"We'll rest the dogs until midnight and then push on to Carson's," he said. He saw Jamie MacMurray looking wistfully towards him. He doubted if Jamie was much of a trailmaker, but he understood his longing. Jamie could go along. He would not delay them much.

It was no longer snowing and the night was clear and sharp when Dougherty took a look at it, a little

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after eleven o'clock. He walked round the building to see how the weather appeared in the north. There was no aurora, sure sign of weather change; the stars were like diamond points.

Ooingoot had thrown up a snow kennel for the dogs. They were stirring, which was unusual. Their general idea was to sleep every moment they were not in harness. Something made them restless, and it was not wolves this time. Finally Dancer got up and stood staring towards the polar regions, almost as if some magnetic influence affected him.

Then Dougherty saw, far off, a figure that stumbled and fell, that picked itself slowly up again and blundered on. Now it walked like a man, now it lumbered on all-fours, like a wounded bear. It fell again, crawled on its belly, reared like a seal on its flippers, fell once more.

The corporal wore only his kumiks and he ran to the front of the store for his snowshoes, pausing to open the door and alarm the three men.

"There's someone trying to reach here," he cried. "He seems to be all in. It might be Carson."

Dougherty and Ooingoot made a race of it, Jamie MacMurray doing his best but tailing far behind. It was hard to know who it was when they reached the man and raised him. His face, what they could see of it, was glazed with a mask of frozen blood that had glued in his hair and the fur of his hood. It had flowed from a wound just above the ear. The cold had checked it finally, though there was no bandage and the man's movements had provoked bleeding.

One arm hung limp from the shoulder, and there his clothing was thick with blood.

He had come through without racquettes from wherever he had been shot, forced himself on towards his goal to the limit of his strength. It was amazing to consider the reserves of will and strength that had brought him this far. If the dogs had not been further disturbed and given alarm, if Dougherty had not caught sight of the staggering figure, he would not have lived much longer. Face in the snow, the low temperature would soon have consumed what was left of vitality.

Jamie came up, and Jamie knew him. It was Daniel Carson, come from disaster. He was unconscious. His heart was beating, but his eyes seemed glazed, staring like those of a dead man.

"Guid God," cried Jamie, "what's happened to Jane?"

"We'll find out," said Dougherty. MacMurray, canny and dependable, was hauling a short sleigh along. He took one look at Carson, spoke with an authority that usurped the moment.

DOUGHERTY knew something of surgery and medicine beyond first aid, but the trader held wide renown as an unlicensed but efficient doctor. "We'll get him inside quickly," he said, "or we'll be losin' him. Jamie, do you go ahead and get oot my kit. We'll be needin' hot water, lots o' 't, wi' bandages an' cotton. Awa' wi' ye, laddie."

Jamie had been looking wildly at Carson's uncertain back trail, as if he wanted to flee along it, to find the girl. He had none of the restraint of experience. But he obeyed his father.

MacMurray lived over his solidly built store in rooms on the second floor. They were all warm and comfortably furnished. There was one of them that the trader called his private hospital. On occasion he would keep and treat an emergency case, and he

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had saved many lives. They got some of the clothes off Carson, cutting them loose, and they put him on a bed with a rubber sheet beneath him, while MacMurray, Dougherty as first, and Jamie as second assistant, examined his wounds, cleansed them, probed them while Carson lay unconscious.

The head wound was a gouge over the right ear that had bitten into the bone, severing surface blood vessels; it must have left him senseless for some time. The left shoulder was shattered at the head of the humerus. The nerve shock must have been tremendous. No doubt the one who had fired the shots thought him dead, left him for the wolves.

MacMurray found the slug in the deltoid muscle, making a slight incision with a lancet, and popping it out like the pip of an orange.

Carson moaned slightly and MacMurray felt his pulse, hurrying to finish disinfecting the wounds and stop any access of bleeding. Then he and Dougherty stripped the trapper, got him into a nightgown and beneath covers before they gave him a restorative.

"He'll do, I'm thinkin'," said MacMurray. "He's tough o' fiber. I fear there's things will be harmin' more than his own hurts." He got some more brandy between Carson's relaxing jaws, coaxed him to swallow it. The trader's eyes opened and he gazed at them for a moment without comprehension. Then intelligence asserted itself. He tried to sit up, but Dougherty held him firmly down with a hand on his chest.

"You know me, Carson. Corporal Dougherty. I'm on patrol with my special constable. You're at MacMurray's, you know. We've dressed your wounds. They are not serious. We brought you in about half an hour ago—"

"Half an hour ago! I don't know how long it took me. What time is it? My God, Jane . . ."

"Steady on, Carson," said the corporal. "You won't be able to talk much for a while. Don't waste your words. We want to know just what happened. Take it easy. I'm right here on the spot, to follow things up. Now then, just the meat of it."

Carson nodded. He had got hold of himself, a man who could do that thing in the face of stress.

"We were halfway here, Jane—and myself—sleigh and six dogs. A man came out of the spruce by the bend of Rabbit Creek. His rifle was uncased. Mine was under lashings. I had nothing else but my knife. Jane had—nothing. He had the rifle pointed at me. I believed he was crazy. His eyes glittered . . ."

MacMURRAY gave him a little more brandy. He did not want to give him too much because he meant to administer a necessary sedative as soon as possible.

"What time was this? What did the man look like?"

"It was a little after noon. He was a big man, tall. Nearer seven feet than six, it looked like. He had a black beard, white fox lining to his parka hood. Walrus kumiks to his knees. Clothes well worn. I asked him what he wanted. Jane was afraid of him. She whispered to me he was mad. I think he heard her."

"Never mind that now," checked Dougherty. "What did he say and do?"

"He said—'I want your dogs—your guns and your snowshoes.' He had the muzzle of his gun covering me all the

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time. 'My own dogs and snowshoes are worn out,' he said. Talked English all right, but with some sort of accent. 'I'll take what dog food you've got,' he said. 'You won't be needing it.' I was looking for a chance, but there wasn't any. No sense in reasoning with a wild man, but Jane tried it. Then . . ."

His voice was trailing away, for all his will.

"Steady," said Dougherty. He slid an arm about the other, raised him, while Jamie slipped another pillow back of him at his father's nod. MacMurray was holding the hypodermic he had loaded for such an emergency with adrenalin. He swiftly cleaned a spot on Carson's arm with a swab of cotton soaked in alcohol, pinched the flesh, sank the sharp fang of the needle.

Carson's pulse went up. Color showed in his lips, his eyes were bright, his voice steadied.

"Jane said, 'You can't do that. We have too far to go. You wouldn't leave us here, without a weapon? Let us have your worn-out dogs.' He said no, that he might need them for dog food. But it fixed his attention on Jane. I don't think he'd noticed her much up to then, watching me. 'I won't leave *you*,' he said. 'I'll take you along. I'll make a queen of you.'"

"A queen?" put in MacMurray. "He was surely daft. 'Tis the wild man folks ha' been so fearfu' aboot. What happened then, Carson?"

"What could happen? We were making the trip by daylight or I might have had a pistol. My rifle was in its case, naturally. Still under the lashings. I must have made some move, for he shot me, first in the shoulder, so close he spun me about. I tripped backwards over the sleigh. He fired again. The flash almost blinded me. I knew I was shot in the head, and that's all I knew, until I came to, two hours later, by the sun. Two hours! The man was gone—Jane was gone. He had left his sleigh and a pair of broken, useless snowshoes. The tracks ran north. I would have been more mad than he is to try to follow, without a weapon, without racquettes. I tried to get here, to MacMurray's. I was almost blind towards the last. All I remember is falling down, and getting up again. I *had* to get here—and I was not sure I was headed right—but I had to—*had to.*"

"You're here," Dougherty told him. "We're getting after that devil. How far away is the bend in the creek, do you think?"

"I'd call it eight miles," Carson answered feebly. The spur of the adrenalin had done its work, reaction was setting in. He sank back, exhausted.

For over eight hours he had struggled, desperately wounded, in agony of both mind and body. It took frontier blood to bring him through. MacMurray prepared the sedative. Carson lay with closed eyes, and lips moving silently. He swallowed the stiff bromide the trader gave him, rather than another hypo. It took hold almost

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immediately. MacMurray turned down the lamp, and they left him.

THE four went to the main store for council. Now the Mountie took over.

"Looks like the man who tried to buy ammunition from you, MacMurray. The first time he's been so far south, I imagine. No doubt, crazy though he is, he has cunning enough to know he will sooner or later be hunted down. He's preparing for it, getting weapons. He's ready to make a dash for some refuge he knows of, or thinks he knows of. Back of Keenowyak, perhaps."

"What made you speak o' that?" asked the trader. "Do ye think there is sic a place?"

"Do you?" countered Dougherty.

"I wouldna commit mysel'. Auld folks' tales last long. There's always truth at the back o' them, somewhere. I've asked aboot it. I've talked wi' shamans. They believe in it. The de'il himsel' lives there, they say, an' he may be callin' in his ain."

"Nanacho gave me the idea," said the corporal. "This man stole fish from them for his dogs. They thought he was an evil spirit, and brought them sickness. What I meant was that I'll follow him to the sea, beyond it, to the pole, if I have to. I and Ooingoot."

MacMurray looked dubiously at Ooingoot. "You would go back of Keenowyak?"

"I shall go, if the trail leads there, though if I do I shall not return. That does not matter."

He spoke with such absolute fatalism that it was convincing. Ooingoot, the Eskimo, steeped in superstition, believed utterly that he would die if he passed behind The Rock that Looks Like a Face, but he was ready to go.

"I wish I could go along," said Jamie.

Dougherty was sorry for him, but he shook his head. "We'll travel light and fast," he said. "We're in training, Ooingoot and myself. You see—"

"I ken weel enough I'm saft, compared to you. I'm a storekeeper, that's a'."

"I'll need ye to nurse Jane's father," said his own, tactfully.

"But ye'll *get* him, you'll bring him *back*, to hang him high as Haman. If he's harmed Jane—"

MacMurray quieted him. Jamie's voice had grown shrill in the hysteria of distress.

Dougherty set hands on Jamie's shoulders, speaking evenly. "I'll get him, and I'll bring him back. I'll not promise they'll hang him. They don't hang dead men."

Nor mad ones, he told himself. There was as yet no definite case against the man. Dougherty refused to let himself think what he might do—what he might have already done—with Jane. Some hope lay in his very insanity. He had talked of making her a queen. There might be some method in his madness, some quirk that would make him treat her with respect, even though he had kidnaped her.

"If we go far north," he went on, "there'll be little wood. If you've got seal-oil, MacMurray, we can use it. We can build igloos, and warm them with lamps. I'll want an extra rifle for Ooingoot. All the dog food we can carry, besides what we'll need ourselves."

To feed the dogs was the most important thing. Without them, transportation was limited to their own human efforts. It looked as if they were going far into the wilds, where even Eskimos sometimes failed to sustain

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life. But, where the Evil One went, they could follow, must follow, swifter than he. Carson's dogs were good ones, Dougherty knew. Jane took care of them, kept them in fine condition. They would go fast.

MacMURRAY went upstairs, returned quickly, bringing a rifle, in the buckskin cover needed to keep the oil from freezing.

"He's goin' fine," he said. "Ooingoot can handle your rifle, corporal? Good. Then I'll be lendin' you this. 'Tis a bonny gun. It's got a Lyman sight, wi' a wind-gage adjustment. She'll knock doon a Kodiak bear at six hundred yards, wi' one shot. You may be needin' a special weapon if ye gang back of Keenowyak. Besides this de'il, there's talk o' strange beasties."

He turned away and busied himself with Jamie in getting together the outfit he knew Dougherty would need. Dougherty looked the gun over gratefully. He was not unfaithful to his regulation rifle, but he knew this for a super-weapon, a sporting rifle that had cost as much as a dozen of the government issue.

There was sporting blood in the Scotch trader. And, in that Scotch blood, there was something else that made him fey. He believed in the goblin-land behind the great rock as much as his forebears had believed in kelpies.

Ooingoot went out to look after the dogs. Dougherty went over the supplies, discarding some of them, but including a light shelter-tent and an alcohol stove. MacMurray provided two bottles of his own brandy.

"If ye dinna have to use them, dinna forget to bring them back," he said.

The stars were dim in the false dawn when they hit the trail. The sign lay all too plain. It was marked with stains where Carson had fallen. Ooingoot had no need for instructions in handling the dogs. They could have sent them along at racing speed and made fifty, sixty, even seventy miles a day, but it would not have lasted and would have left the huskies worn out and dispirited; unable to stand short rations if they were reduced to them, or to make a sudden spurt to overhaul the quarry.

The thing to do was to make the most out of them at an average that must be steadily maintained, hoping to set it above that of the madman. It was hard to figure out how his crazed brain would work, but it seemed fair enough to suppose that he would realize that this last deed of his could not be hidden for long.

He had undoubtedly left Carson for dead, and he might think the wolves pretty certain to devour him. He must know the country was infested with them, and that they were hungry. That might also account for the girl, though old-timers were not afraid of them, so long as cartridges held out.

But he had the girl with him, constant reminder to him that she would be missed, searched for. He would go fast. They checked up on this when they came to where the Evil One had left his own sleigh, not a toboggan, but set on runners which were worn thin as whiplashes. He had discarded the old dog harness, or most of it, with his broken-down snowshoes.

They could see the history of the tragedy in the snow. The wind had riffled it a little, but it was plain reading to them. Especially to Ooingoot, expert tracker. He pointed out where the girl must have put up a brief struggle, but the hands that had slain Regnier—if these were the same—had soon subdued her.

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Evidently he had bound her on the sleigh, bearing off the woman he meant to make a "queen."

THE tracks of the dogs, as they dug in their claws, showed them going at a good gait. The pursuers tried to better it. The trail led north. The second day they came across a small party of Eskimos looking for a herd of caribou. According to them, a "big man" had driven a sleigh with six dogs in harness, three trailing behind in leash, passing them without any hailing-sign, nine hours before.

They thought, but were not sure, that there was somebody lying on the sleigh. "Sick," they fancied, not thinking it might be somebody tied there. It looked as if Dougherty and Ooingoot had gained three hours. But nine hours was a long lead, on a trail where the weather might change at any hour, blank out all sign, set up an impassable barrier between pursuers and pursued.

The "big man," according to the Eskimos, was traveling due north. They thought him either a great fool or a great wizard, for he was heading for the Barrens, where there were no trees, no game, no lakes in which to fish. And beyond the Barrens lay the mighty rock of Keenowyak, which, as all men knew, guarded the Land of Goblins.

Ooingoot told them his own official position, and the rank of Dougherty, which he exaggerated.

"You are brave men," said the leader of the party, "but you go to certain death. If you seek this man, because he has done evil and deserves to die, go no further. For he will surely be destroyed."

He begged tobacco, and Dougherty gave him some. In return, he presented the corporal with a fetish, a whale carved in walrus tusk ivory, with a movable tail, half the size of the Mountie's hand.

He grinned at both of them, his teeth filed short—so as not to look so much like those of a dog. He warned them of bad weather.

His fetish might be a futile thing, but he knew what he was talking about when it came to weather. That night the moon showed mock-moons at the ends of four shafts of light. It grew warmer towards morning, and then a sudden and sinister wind blew south, driving a hurricane of snow before it, blotting out everything, sending the thermometer pounding down to sixty-seven below.

The dogs quit. The snow filled their eyes; it was strong enough to balk their best efforts, and it piled up in one great drift, a flood that rose steadily.

Through the flakes the light was diffused, gray, lacking all sunlight. Dougherty could only hope that the Evil One had been caught in it, anchored, as they were. There was nothing to do but dig in.

At first the snow had fallen silently, slantingly. Now it began to come in horizontal streaks; the wind began to howl.

Ooingoot started looking for "good" snow, to build an igloo.

THE Eskimo looked for a good drift of even consistency. He had brought from MacMurray's a broom handle, with which he prodded likely places with a steady shove, looking for uniform pressure. Then he took a shovel and started to cut his blocks.

The dogs had curled themselves up, but, beyond their tails, their eyes looked on with interest. They sensed the storm. Now, more than ever, they acknowledged the two-legged beings as gods.

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Ooingoot dug a little pit and changed shovel for a long-bladed knife, like a machete. He chopped out blocks two feet long, half that wide, six inches thick, trimming them deftly. He set them on edge, slightly undercutting them. He tiered them expertly to the left, so that the wall rose in a spiral. Dougherty carried the blocks to him, and rubbed loose snow into the crevices. It took five tiers, and Ooingoot made a hole so that the corporal could slide the blocks through.

Ooingoot chipped the keystone of the dome, lowered it so that it lidded the final aperture, while Dougherty chinked. The Eskimo crawled out through the hole, and both shoveled and packed snow on the wall until the igloo was shaped like a cone.

They made a tunnel, where the cold air would mount until it met that of the heated interior. They built a platform of broken blocks inside, covered it with skins and blankets, started their alcohol lamp, made a small gap in the roof.

Now they would be snug. The intense cold outside would meet the interior heat and regulate the thawing, turning the snow blocks into ice.

Next they made high walls into a kennel for the dogs. Protected from the wind, they would get along. Even if the snow buried them they would breathe, huddled together, the exhalation from their lungs piping air to them.

Inside the igloo the thermometer went up to seventy. It was sixty below outside. The aperture in the roof filmed over. At intervals one of them broke it, as their bedding overwarmed them.

They hung blankets where the tunnel came up into the igloo. Once a day they fed the dogs, finding them in good shape.

So for three days.

On the fourth, when they emerged, the landscape was entirely changed. The snow had filled in the valleys between old drifts, created new snow-hills, obliterated all that had, even before, been only a snowy waste, without any outstanding features. There was sunblink on the ridges, with delusive shadows in between.

All sign was obliterated; they stood in a white, trackless wilderness. The sun, and their compass, told them where lay the cardinal points, but that did them little good, save that Dougherty believed they should hold on north. And Ooingoot agreed.

The Evil One was headed for Keenowyak and the Back of Beyond. A goblin-hunted country, hidden in mist and myth. It was more than a hunch to the Mountie, it was a definite assurance.

He asked Ooingoot if he had any true idea of where the great Rock That Looks Like a Face might be found.

Ooingoot took it seriously enough. He had no doubt of the rock, of the place behind it that it would be death for him to enter there. Death also for the corporal, he believed; though there was always a chance that the white man's magic might prevail. It might save the girl, if she could now be saved. But he, Ooingoot, was doomed.

YET there was in the Eskimo a spirit of daring, the hardy spirit of his tribesmen who chose the pitiless Northland for their own. It made him accept the challenge of Dougherty, willing to defy fate.

He took a stick and poked holes in the overnight crust.

His astronomy was good. He marked correctly the constellation of the Bears —Ursus Major and Minor—the Big and Little Dippers. In the field of their

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stars lay Polaris, the North Star; and the true pole.

He left the stick in Polaris.

"Now these things are true," he said. "Five hundred moons ago there was a great famine. There was sickness among the moose and the caribou. They died, so that their bodies lay everywhere, and to eat the meat was death. Even the wolves died from eating it. Also, that year, the lemmings marched into the sea or the people would have eaten them, though their meat is foul. The rabbits died. There were no berries, no grass. The people died like flies in a frost. And some went south to find food and did not find it. The shamans said that there came evil from the sun. That I do not know, but I have heard that white wizards talk also of times when the sun sends evil to the land. This is true, that even the fish did not breed, that they floated bellies up in the lakes and rivers. That the seals did not come to the beaches."

"I have read of that time," said Dougherty. But he knew that it had been nearer a thousand than five hundred moons ago. Eskimo accounting had its limits. The Hudson's Bay records of the middle nineteenth century recorded this pestilence and famine.

"In those days," Ooingoot went on, his English better than "pidgin" on occasion, because of this mission-school training, "the white men did not give out food, except for furs. Many of us died, also the Chippewyans, the Dogribs and their peoples. And some of my people went north, looking for caribou.

"They brought back a strange tale. They came to a cliff that looked like the face of a man. That was magic, and it made them afraid. Also the ground shook, there were strange noises and lights in the sky, not the same as those we see. So they took counsel. Because they were weak, and very hungry, some of them went on to where there seemed to be trees. There were no women in the party, for they had left them behind with the children, and what there was left of food.

"The hunters did not return. The others saw great fires that turned night into day. They saw hills melting. The air stank, and they could not breathe. Beasts like moose, but twice the size of any moose, came from the hills. They killed two of them, those who stayed behind, but the beasts were hard to kill. Their horns were too big to measure.

"So they ate, and while they slept the earth opened and made a gulf between them and the cliff that looked like a face. Keenowyak. That was the time it was named. They could not breathe the air that stank as if great cannon had been fired. Also there was the sound of cannon firing, with much smoke.

"Therefore they fled. Now these were the weakest of those who had gone north. Only a few returned to the women and children. That winter they lived on their dogs. They stewed them with ground moss, but there was no marrow in the bones, though the dog-meat did not poison them. In the spring those who were alive found that there came no more evil from the sun. It was a good year. The shamans made their magic, and it was strong. But they gave out an order not to talk of the evil that had come upon us, because they feared the white men, who were then beginning to come into the land, might think us weak and take the land for themselves.

"It is now their land," said Ooingoot. "There is a curse upon my people. They look to the white man to feed them. They are forgetting their old ways of living. They do not hunt

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or fish. And they are few. Strange sicknesses come upon them. Soon they will be finished—what you call washed-up."

HE spoke with dignity. Dougherty had no answer. He felt that the advent of the white race inevitably meant the passing of the native. The two could not blend. Traces might linger. It was the survival of the fittest.

"Did they see any men, those who came back?" Dougherty asked.

Ooingoot replied with positive conviction.

"They saw shapes that looked like men, but they were devils. These came from the hills and drove back the big moose in the night. Those who were waking saw them and laid still, as if they were dead."

"The devils did not harm them?"

"No, for they had with them Puissip, the greatest of all shamans. He made a spell and they were invisible, even to the devils."

There was the tale, long forbidden to be spoken, handed down in whispers in a language purely oral, without written signs. Less than a hundred years had made it legend, but it might hold the grains of truth.

CHAPTER IV.

BACK OF BEYOND.

THE man unbound Jane Carson from the sleigh. He had done that at intervals, always watching her, fearing that in her terror of him she would choose to flee when he slept, preferring to perish in the snows, to give herself to the wolves, rather than await his final disposition of her.

She got up and looked about her, then at him, with horror in her eyes, but no longer fear. She had conquered that. Whatever he did, to whatever she might have to submit, she promised herself it would not last long.

It was noon. All morning they had striven to find a way across the rocky cañon that had suddenly appeared, the man trying to discover finally some side ravine, up which they could pass to the new country, of which, he assured her, she would be the queen and he the supreme monarch. At last he located it, a cleft that jagged its way up behind a huge buttress of the cliff that was a mass of pitted, fire-burned rock.

It had the semblance of a face, a huge and hideous countenance, grotesque and fearful, like the lineaments of some god that guarded the place.

So far he had not harmed her, this mad giant. There were times when he seemed quite sane; then the light of a crafty and cunning craziness blazed in his eyes and he talked of the enemies who beset him, but whom he would defeat. He would rule over a people who were white of skin and blue of eye, and she would rule with him.

She looked about her, marveling and shrinking. It seemed to her she must be witnessing some strange sort of mirage, here at the top and the end of the world, beyond the frozen deserts they had passed.

There was no snow. The air was warm though the skies were gray, and the earth was veiled with a light mist. Through it she thought she saw the gleam of a lake, and trees with tall trunks and plumy foliage. There came a rumble, and the ground trembled under her feet. The dogs the man was looking after whined and whimpered.

The man spoke to them.

"You are through hauling sleighs. We shall make watchdogs out of you, hunting dogs. So quiet down."

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Jane Carson began to wonder if she herself had not gone mad. She had seen her father shot down, murdered, left to the beasts, and for her had followed a nightmare of travel under the sun, beneath the darting aurora, captive of this man-monster.

There came a rumble, then a hissing roar. She saw in the distance a great spout of water rise and fall. There were flowers in the crevices of the rocks, alpine blooms, silken anemones, turquoise petals, velvety, like sublime forget-me-nots.

The man laughed, threw back his parka, wiped his beard. There was sweat on his forehead and he wiped that away with the back of his hand, stripped off his outer coat, then the next one, as she shuddered. She was herself bathed in a perspiration of heat and terror. The atmosphere was like that of a Turkish bath—oppressive.

The man was now stripped to the waist. His torso was shaggy with black hair, his great arms were hairy as an ape's.

"They wear few clothes here," he said. "We shall devise some for you, coronation robes for our union."

She shrank back into a shallow cavern. She had on a serge skiing suit beneath her furred outer garments, and she wore Eskimo-tanned kumiks. She longed to take off the heavier things, but dared not lest it stimulate the madman to ideas of immediate possession.

And she prayed, her lips moving, her eyes fixed on his. She had nothing with which to kill herself, or try to hold him off.

THE man unharnessed the dogs, leashing them, tying them all to a crag of lava that thrust up like a spur. They seemed bewildered by their surroundings and the heat. They lay down, panting, their pink tongues dripping with moisture, running back and forth over their front fangs.

Again the ground trembled. Once more a mountain of steaming water gushed and fell. It seemed to Jane Carson that she caught a fiery glow, dully crimson, through the mists.

"We are saluted," said the man. "Soon our subjects will come, or we shall seek them."

He started to unpack the sleigh. There were four rifles, three revolvers, besides the one that now showed holstered on his belt. A quantity of ammunition cartons of various calibers.

"This is my authority, in case they do not recognize it," he said. "See you do not meddle with it. I—"

He paused, picking up a pair of binoculars, focussing them, ranging back the way they had come. They were now at the summit of the cliff, on top the nature-carven head.

The man was fully six feet and a half tall, his shoulders wide and his chest deep in proportion. The outer coat he had taken off was of white bearskin worn fur inside. It was hard to tell what nationality might definitely claim him. He might have been Slavic or Nordic, with strains of Kalmūk, Mongol or Dane.

Along the Arctic Circle, through Russia and Siberia, beyond the Bering Strait, across Alaska and Canada to Greenland, there is a mingling of kin. He was surely a northerner or he would not have survived in the lonely environment that he had chosen, fleeing from the consequences of deeds he had himself forgotten.

Solitude had deadened his reasoning, save as stirred by the demands of circumstance, or with flashes from his unsound mind, warped by loneliness.

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He had cast off civilization, a northern Esau, with every man's hand against him.

Now he was seeking a final sanctuary, knowing with instinct, rather than memory, that the hunt would soon be closing in, following a bloody trail.

His madness was streaked with the pith of stories he had heard, talk of the white Eskimos of Victoria Island, of a yet stranger remnant of a forgotten race, marooned on a shore stranger than that of Tierra del Fuego, some spot that Nature had not yet completed, where Vulcan still forged lightnings, and ancient creature-forms flourished. A place where volcanic forces still defied the polar offsets that had changed climates, buried once tropical forests and molten lava under deep rinds of ice.

Travelers' tales, native legends, just the sort of fantastic story to take root in the disrupted channels of his brain.

His eyes glittered beneath shaggy eyebrows, and he muttered more or less incoherent syllables as he twisted the focussing screw of his glasses. His hair grew, lank and coarse, to his shoulders.

He was now barbarian, whatever he had been; primitive save for his weapons and his knowledge of how to use them, the broken gleams concerning the customs of the life he had left behind, to which he dared not return.

Once he had not worn a beard, his hair had been trimmed, his attire orderly as his habits. Now, who or what he had been did not matter to him. Nothing had mattered save that he live, reach the haven he believed in. To kill was, with him, as natural a reaction as any savage brute, but the woman had evoked within his delirium vague dreams of grandeur, the always latent illusions of megalomania, the aloof mysticisms and hallucinations of paranoia.

He spoke English by choice, but his disjointed murmurs held the words of several tongues. His dementia had doubtless been inherent, now arrived at the phase of "ambitious" paranoia, a supreme and fixed belief in a noble destiny, a determination to acquire it that swept aside all obstacles. As with the subjects of most forms of paranoia, he was inclined to crimes of violence and extreme cruelty. His mind was diseased and could not be ministered to.

Jane Carson took off her furs, relieved from their weight, finding her skiing togs more than sufficiently warm. She was glad of the increased freedom of action, and looked longingly at the rifles. They were still in their cases, no doubt unloaded. They were not going to help her—not now.

In the field of his powerful glasses the man saw the toiling figures of Dougherty and Ooingoot, the sleigh with the straining dogs. He did not recognize the men, never having seen them, but he was sure from their gait that one was white, the other a native.

It would, he knew, take two hours before they even reached the far edge of the gorge, torn in a convulsion of nature a thousand moons ago.

THROUGH his own binoculars, Dougherty had made out the rock. The goal was in sight. They had once more picked up the sign of the Evil One, and now they would not lose it. They saw nothing of the spouting geysers, the crimson glow pulsating through the mists, only that the land was foggy and that there was no snow on the hills, whose tops were shrouded so that they could not tell their shape.

The man called to the girl:

"I have seen enemies. We shall be

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ready to welcome them when they arrive. His "*we*" was regal. It was characteristic of his insanity that he did not dream it possible the girl would not respond to his wishes. That *his* enemies could be *her* friends. He was even capable of a certain chivalry towards her, tempered with a low cunning that made him watchful. Sooner or later his amatory intentions would be obtruded, and he would persecute her.

Rid of her parka, she had no covering for her head. Curls of pale gold gleamed there like soft feathers, close-cropped, like a helmet. He saw this as he came back to her, and a light came into his eyes that made her want to scream. Her heart pounded as he advanced to where she crouched, desperate in her shallow niche. She wanted to run, but her limbs seemed bereft of motion, no sound came from her dry throat as he advanced with arms and hands outspread, like a man who has his quarry in a corner and means to grab it.

"Your hair, so golden, like silk of gold," he whispered. "Do not shrink from me. I am your king. We shall—"

Back of him the dogs broke out into furious barking. They leaped repeatedly to the end of their leashes, chafing the main strap that held them to the rough horn of rock.

A score of men were advancing up the slope. They wore kilts of fur and sandals of leather, cross-gartered to their knees. Their skins were white as milk, bleached by the warm, wet clime, their eyes were blue and their hair ruddy. Well built and muscular, they came on unafraid and challenging. They carried spears whose points were bright metal, copper, instead of the ivory-tipped lances of the Eskimo. And one man, with a yellow beard, leading them, flourished a sword, double-edged, long of blade, like a crusader's weapon. Another had a battle-ax. These two last weapons were of steel, and the man with the sword had a cone-shaped helmet with metal wings. He was almost as big a man as the Evil One, though a strong contrast with his white skin.

Some of them had blue designs that looked like flesh-tattooing.

The leader shouted at the Evil One in a strange tongue. He seemed at once to demand an explanation and surrender.

The Evil One confronted them arrogantly, gestured at them to halt so imperatively and assuredly that they slackened pace.

As he stepped aside, drawing his revolver, they caught sight of Jane Carson, golden-haired like themselves, unmistakable a woman, for all her ski-pants.

A universal cry went up of *"Wifmon! Wifmon!"* It held the glad and eager ring of men whose numbers were steadily dying out through lack of females. It was a mating cry, rather than one of lust, but it was plain in its meaning.

Now the Evil One, whom she had feared, was her protector. To the ruddy-haired, tattooed men he was immediately to be destroyed.

Spears were flung, and he dodged them. The swordsman came in, blade ready to thrust him through, or cleave him to the chin.

Then the heavy revolver barked and spat. The leader was stopped by the impact of the slug and its striking force. The bullet hole showed directly over his heart. He fell forward on his face with a look of indignant surprise that faded into the mask of death. His

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great sword fell, and his helmet went clattering down the slope.

AGAIN and again the pistol belched its venom. To the ruddy ones it was the voice of a god, smiting them mysteriously. The axman looked incredulously at his smashed shoulder. Another felt the hot blood bubbling and gushing through the hole in his throat and his mouth.

A fourth was shot between the eyes and dropped as if pole-axed before they broke and fled.

The madman, acting precisely now, emptied his pistol, leaped for a rifle and stripped off the case, thrusting a clip into the firing chamber. He knelt to perfect his aim, shooting deliberately, and with the delight of a child using a slingshot on a flock of sparrows. He shouted as they dropped. The girl called to him, but he was deaf to her. These were rebels who had opposed his entry, they must be taught a lesson, shown he was supreme.

If they did not realize they were his subjects they must be convinced. He slaughtered them with no more compunction than if he had been shooting rabbits, pleased with his skill.

To them, as they raced for life, he sent out lightnings and thunder. Such things they had never seen. They were warriors, remnants of a gallant band of Vikings who had missed Greenland, held on in their dragon galleys, wrecked at last; held by the crashing floes and Arctic billows, by the wild leagues of snowy barrens to the south.

On their way they had picked up a few women, not their own stalwart race, but still women. They had bred with them in this strange refuge, some of them surviving the volcanic upheavals that occurred from time to time. They hunted the giant moose, the hairy mammoths, until they exterminated them.

They were better off than the men of another galley, stranded on Victoria Island, becoming white Eskimos. These were still Norsemen, but they knew nothing of guns. Even their stout hearts failed them in a mad panic.

They held vague stories of Odin and of Thor, of gods that ruled the heavens or lived in the underworld. Not a thousand moons, but a thousand years had passed since that first landing. They knew metal, and they had found copper to replace their own spear points. But the battle-ax and the broadsword were all, with the helmet, that were now left of steel, the ax and sword-blades worn thin and narrow. And now they had failed them, their two chiefs had fallen. The leader of all was dead, the second in command they had borne along in the flight.

"It would have been better had we brought our shields," said one as they retreated to the stone houses they had built.

"They would not have availed. The thunderbolts would have pierced them. This must be a son of Loki and Midgard. This is the hour of Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods. Was it not always prophesied by the sage, Vengar? Has not the earth shuddered for the last score of days? The light of Freya is darkened by the evil of Hordu!"

There were only five of them unwounded; seven of them were dead. And there were no more. No youths, no children, no babes. The native women had died out in the warm fogs, generation after generation. Only the tremendous initial stamina of the sires had prevailed at all. And now the Evil One, though he did not know it, had destroyed his "kingdom," so far as subjects were concerned.

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The wounded were sorely hurt. They did not know how to handle their hurts, believing themselves blasted. Those least harmed did what they could with disbelief in their ministrations. They cowered in their stone houses. They no longer desired the woman, for she was a goddess, and surely the black-haired one was a god, was Loki, who could change himself into whatever shape he chose.

"They wanted you," said the madman to Jane. "I saw it in their faces. But I will make them your slaves. Our slaves. They shall wait upon us, we will tread upon their necks."

"You did not have to kill them like that."

"Why not? Am I not their emperor? Am I not God?"

OUT on the plain, Dougherty and Ooingoot heard the shooting, carried far on the cold planes of air, flung back by the sullen, mist-swathed hills. The Eskimo cracked the long whip, the dogs leaned into the harness, straining their sinews as the two men urged them on.

It was getting warmer. The snow was thin. Soon it was only a broken crust as they neared the edge of the great rift. The ground showed through, and it became harder and harder for the dogs to haul the sleigh.

Dougherty called a halt. The shooting had long ago ceased. It could have been against men or beasts. Dougherty dared not speculate about what might have happened. He was there to find out. Of one thing he was positive, that the one who had fired the shots was the madman who had abducted Jane Carson, shot down her father, broken Regnier's spine with bare hands, and without doubt had made away in hideous, remorseless fashion with the trappers who were known to be missing; very likely with natives who had something he wanted or in some way provoked him.

Whether there were men here behind the frowning bastion of the cliff, where the huge head frowned in menace, or whether they were, as Ooingoot believed, goblins and ghosts, they would not possess firearms.

"We'll leave the dogs here, Ooingoot. No sense in trying to take them across. They wouldn't be any use to us if we did. They'll snug-in until we come back."

Ooingoot nodded. He believed his doom was close upon him, but there was that in it that made him ready to go to meet it. He fed the huskies, saw them bedded down in a drift of snow between two hummocks, leashed them Indian fashion, with sticks tied close to their collars and also to the thongs so that they could not reach to chew the leather.

DOUGHERTY frowned as he surveyed the gorge, searching, as the Evil One had searched, for the best place to cross and ascend. He saw wisps and eddies of vapor issuing from crevices, and he thought they grew steadily in volume.

He did not know much about seismic disturbances, but it seemed to him that some sort of volcanic outburst was in the making.

It was very still. In the quietude he could hear the rumble and rush of the geysers he could not see, and did not think of. And there were more ominous, deeper noises, a grating as of shifting rocks, a hollow boom, and now he could see the crimson glare through the fog. Once it was vivid enough to reveal the tall hill it crested, as a cone, partly split, like a bishop's miter.

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A bright stream, lurid as molten iron, issued from the gap, started to writhe down like a fiery snake before the mists closed in and hid it all.

Across the gorge a mass of rock detached itself, and pounded to the bottom of the cañon, leaving a lateral pit through which steam gushed.

The time that the Evil One had spent taking his huskies and his sleigh with its supplies across to his "kingdom" was not wasted by the corporal and Ooingoot.

They used the same cleft the madman had chosen and climbed in desperate haste to the top, back of the great head.

Three times they were forced to cling to the sides of the chimney as the world seemed to rock.

They found the unpacked sleigh, the tied-up dogs, no longer barking but lying down with their heads towards the valley where the geysers spouted intermittently and the plumed trees grew beside the lake. Their eyes were intent, all their senses alert, and they were uneasy.

Dougherty picked up the battle-ax. The sword was gone. The madman had taken it with some idea of a scepter. It pleased his demented mind. Now that his delusions were eminent he was entirely insane, childish in some things. He reloaded his rifle and his revolver, but he seemed to forget the other weapons and the ammunition. He was the King!

He had forgotten the men and the sleigh he had seen through his glasses. Jane Carson had not. They were her hope, her desperate hope. They must have come after her. *They must have.* And she prayed that they would arrive in time, that she would be able to keep the lunatic's muddled mind diverted from her.

Now he was enjoying his personal triumph.

He bade her pick up her furs and march with him down into the valley by the lake. Past the dead and mortally wounded men.

Past a great pit, with smooth, funnel sides that gleamed in opalescence, like chalcedony, like the nacre of some tremendous shell. Just before they reached it there came a guttural coughing sound, and then the geyser belched its steam and water. It was boiling, it scalded her face, though it was twenty yards away and its spray did not touch them.

After the emission the air was filled with a stench of gas that made the girl muffle her mouth and nose as she followed the madman pellmell. He grabbed her wrist and jerked her, flying, free of the ground as he leaped through the fumes from the geyser.

Aside from that there was a growing smell of sulphur and of niter as if heavy artillery had been discharged, heightened by bomb explosions from the active crater.

THE self-crowned king strode on, his eyes fixed on an assembly of stone houses at the far end of the lake. They were low, save for one of two stories, about which the rest made a ring. It was the town of the lost Vikings. Most of the houses were empty. The little town was deserted. The survivors did not dare to dispute it with "Loki," their conqueror, who slew them with thunderbolts. And they were obsessed that this was the end of all things. They expected every moment to see the final conflict start between the good gods, Æsir, and the powers of Hel, released from bondage, under the leadership of Loki, who was already on the ground. They watched

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the homicidal maniac, who thought himself a king, and they thought a god, march with the golden-haired one they had so foolishly desired through the trees into the town.

Great green nuts hung in clusters from the palms; there were towering cryptomeria, more nearly gigantic grasses than trees. Golden papaias swung above their checkered trunks. There were climbing vines and parasites with showers of pink, orange and purple blossoms, orchids, flowering bushes, high ferns.

The king walked through all this as if it were his own Eden, and the girl his new-found Eve. But he showed an inclination to look into every house, and she encouraged him, stalling for time, praying that the enemies he had spoken of were not just a vision of his unsound mind.

The houses were much the same. There were stools and tables and benches of wood, some of them boldly carven. The windows were glazed with membranes, there was a hole in each roof for fire smoke. Jane made the inspection as minute as she could, calling his attention to this and that, but she felt him looking at her, knew his desire for her was mounting. She wanted to run, but knew he would catch her, and that would be the end.

The double-storied house had an inner stairway. The furnishings were more elaborate, there were wooden bowls and chests, low couches in the upstairs rooms covered with rugs. There was a balcony.

He took her out upon it and she gazed up at the top of the great stone face. She saw the leashed dogs, the dead men lying there. Nothing else. Suddenly he picked her up and bore her inside. She forced herself to smile at him.

"When does the coronation take place?" she asked. "As soon as the people assemble? You said they would come in to pay you homage!"

"They will come. But there is no need to wait for them."

"But there must be wreaths, and flowers, and fruit for the wedding feast," she cajoled. "Do you not want me to be beautiful?"

"You are beautiful," he whispered huskily. "Your hair . . ."

She suffered the caress; she forced herself to stroke his rough cheek. "You are not clad like a king," she said. "There were robes in that chest downstairs. Look, while I get the fruit and flowers."

The fancy caught him. He wanted to dress up. The robes were old garments brought in the galleys.

He started to take them out and, checking the desire for flight, she strolled outside.

She went toward the lake. She did not swim very well, but she thought she could paddle out to where it was deep, if she could not find a spot close to shore; swim out and drown herself. But now little jets of vapor were forming under the water. It was hot, beginning to boil. The air was hard to breathe.

Once she saw ruddy heads watching her from a ridge. They wanted her too. She might be able to get a weapon from them.

She heard the deep, wild shout of the maniac, glimpsed him through the trees. She could dodge him for a while, play a grim hide and seek. The bombs were exploding in the mountain. A smoking mass hurtled through the air and splashed into the lake. And the lake was rising. Its surface was covered with the white bellies of fish. A geyser roared and hissed. The glare over the

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crater was incessant. There were two streams of lava flowing down it now.

THE earth shook in a violent tremor, and she reeled. One of the giant redwoods, balanced, rather than anchored, with its shallow roots, toppled. Then another. She felt she was going mad—*mad*—and she started to run, frantically, back to the great head. She could fling herself from the summit.

The madman saw her through the trees and came after her, excited by the chase.

The ruddy men raised themselves. This was not what they had expected.

Down from the cliff two men were running. One of them wore a scarlet coat.

The girl saw that flash of red and her heart leaped.

The madman saw it, and bellowed. He was sane enough to know that here were his enemies, that they were men of the law who would take him, shut him up, hang him!

He had left rifle and sword behind in the stone house. He had flung a blue cape, broidered in tarnished gold thread, over his shoulders. It spread out behind him as he leaped in pursuit of the girl. They should not take her from him. He would kill them, kill them all. He reached for his revolver.

Dougherty had his Colt ready in his hand. He saw the girl, flying to reach him, the giant gaining. They had been forced to leave their rifles at the foot of the cliff for the climb up the narrow chimney. The Mountie did not see the ruddy men, creeping, spears in hand, among the rocks. He hardly noted the growing signs of eruption. In this tremendous setting, tragic and spectacular beyond imagination, human beings worked out their little destinies.

The corporal had known from the dead men that there were inhabitants to be reckoned with, but the girl was his objective, her safety, and the capture or killing of the wild man.

The madman started firing. He did not wish to hurt the girl and she spoiled his first aim. His eyes blazed, the whites of them were red, he slavered on his beard.

The ruddy men made a rush. These were not gods. They had strange weapons, but they were men, they could be killed. Their leaders must be avenged.

Ooingoot saw them coming, turned to face them with his own pistol. Three flung their spears and four rushed him, holding them like lances. He killed one and crippled another, but Ooingoot was not a crack shot. A spear raked his side. Another drove in at the base of his neck, deep, severing the great vein and artery.

Dougherty turned and knew that Ooingoot had met the doom he prophesied, died in defending the rear attack. The corporal opened fire and brought two of them down. The rest wavered. He missed a third shot as a spearhead gashed his cheek, but got the next.

Panic seized the survivors once again. If these men were not gods, they were devils. Let them settle their own affairs.

The bombs came blasting from the crater. A mighty wind blew and made a boiling, furious ocean of the lake, bowed the trees, sent the nuts flying like hand-flung pebbles.

Dougherty had no time to reload. The girl was close now, but she was almost done, the madman gaining with every stride.

Dougherty fired and knew he scored, but the maniac was charged with insane

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strength and energy. He took the bullet in his chest, but came right on.

JANE CARSON felt his breath, felt the touch of his fingertips, and bounded like a doe that hears the click of wolf jaws at its heels. She passed Dougherty, stumbled, fell in a heap, sobbing for breath.

The maniac fired as he came on. It was pointblank range. The Mountie was hit high in the left arm. His face was spurting blood. He had two shots left. He sent a slug into the hairy chest, bared by the open cape. The wild man seemed to stagger, then he recovered. He flung his empty gun at the corporal, who ducked it and rushed bellowing on to come to grips.

Dougherty's last bullet went home. It was no use to try to maim the madman, to stop him with body wounds. The lead entered between the wild eyes. He spun about, dropped to his knees, on his side, and went slithering down the smooth funnel of the geyser basin, plugging the exit for a moment, then disappearing. Instantly the irritated mechanism vomited. The body showed on the spout for a moment, as a pith ball plays on a jet. Then it dropped, with the subsiding water, steamed and half-flayed, sucked into the geyser's maw, like a dead rat down a drain.

Dougherty caught up the half fainting girl and they ran for their lives.

With a frightful roar the top of the crater blew up and off. A Niagara of lava raced down towards the lake, burning the trees like matches. The earth heaved under him as he ran, sprinkling his blood on himself and the girl, toiling up to the top of the cliff. The dogs were howling in terror. He put down the girl for a second and cut them free with the ax.

As best he could, he protected the girl as he scrambled and slid down the chimney, his flesh torn, his clothes in ribbons when they reached the bottom. She was in better shape than he. Hand in hand they raced across the quaking chasm. Steam hid the sheer horror of the cataclysm, a throbbing glare behind it. Through the vapor the great face thrust out. Then, with a rending crash, it broke from the cliff. Keenowyak was no more.

He harnessed the dogs, eager enough to get away, made her swathe herself in blankets and Ooingoot's sleeping bag.

The huskies leaped into the harness, dug in their claws, southward bound.

At the journey's end were her father, who would, he told her, be alive, and Jamie, who had wanted to come for her.

"He will be wild to see you," said Dougherty.

Jane Carson did not seem wildly enthused at the news.

"He would not have been much help to *you*," she said. "It was you who saved me, Jimmy."

That was true enough, and she was sweet enough, but there were other matters. Nanacho and his chief, reports, duties that must always come not merely before pleasure, but before love with a non-commissioned officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted.

"Ooingoot did as much as I did," he parried. "They killed him."

"And wounded you. You must let me help you get healed, along with daddy."

"That will be fine," said Jimmy Dougherty. He thought again of Nanacho and grinned. He had plenty of work cut out for him. The Grand Patrol was still unfinished.

THE END

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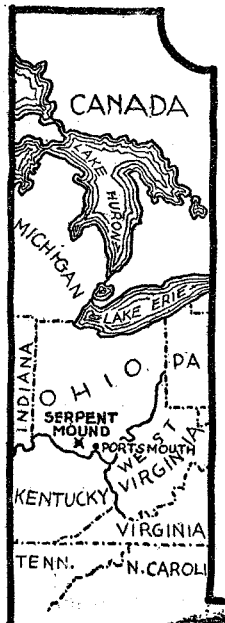


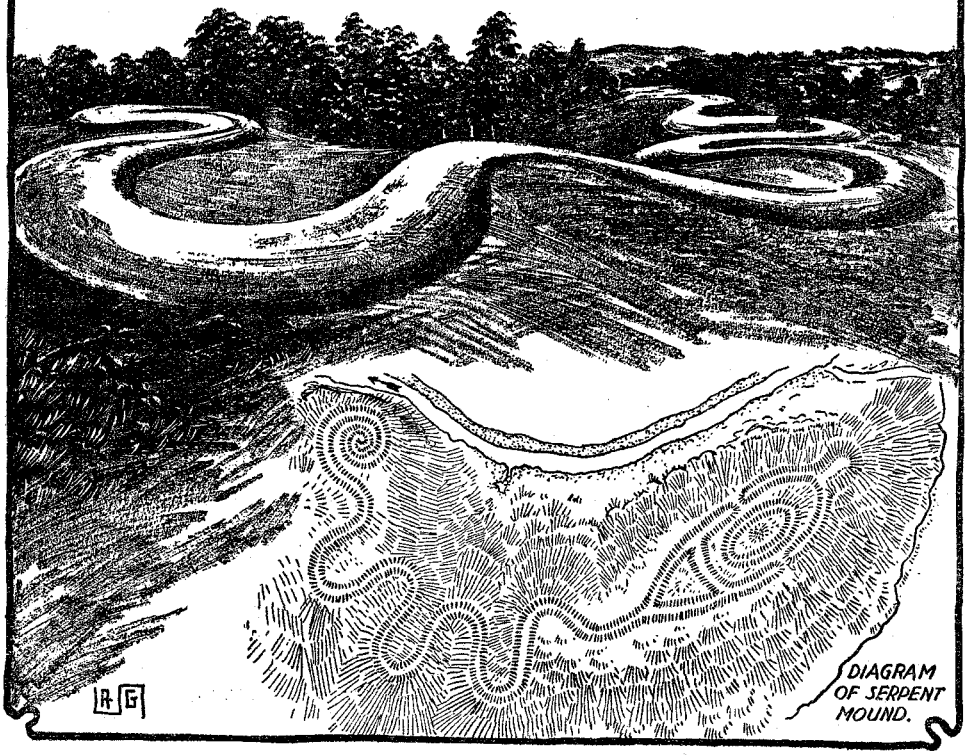
Wonders of the World

OF all the Indian mounds which may be found today in the central part of the United States none is larger than the great Serpent Mound situated in Adams County, Ohio. It stretches for 1,350 feet along a narrow ridge at the junction of two streams. From its position one is led to believe that it was originally constructed as a work of defense. But there is little doubt that it had religious significance also. Across its open jaws (see diagram), the great Serpent Mound measures 75 feet; while the body itself is 30 feet across and 5 feet high. The loops form fort-like enclosures surrounded by earthen walls.

This mound and many others are believed to have been constructed by the ancestors of the American Indians. Presenting a wide variety of shapes and sizes in the forms of birds, reptiles and animals, these strange earthen formations were in some way connected with tribal totems and religious ceremonies. Indian tribes were still occupying mounds and constructing them as late as a century after the discovery of America. But what became of the mound builders remains a mystery.

The SERPENT MOUND

"The Greatest Image of the Prehistoric Mound Builders"



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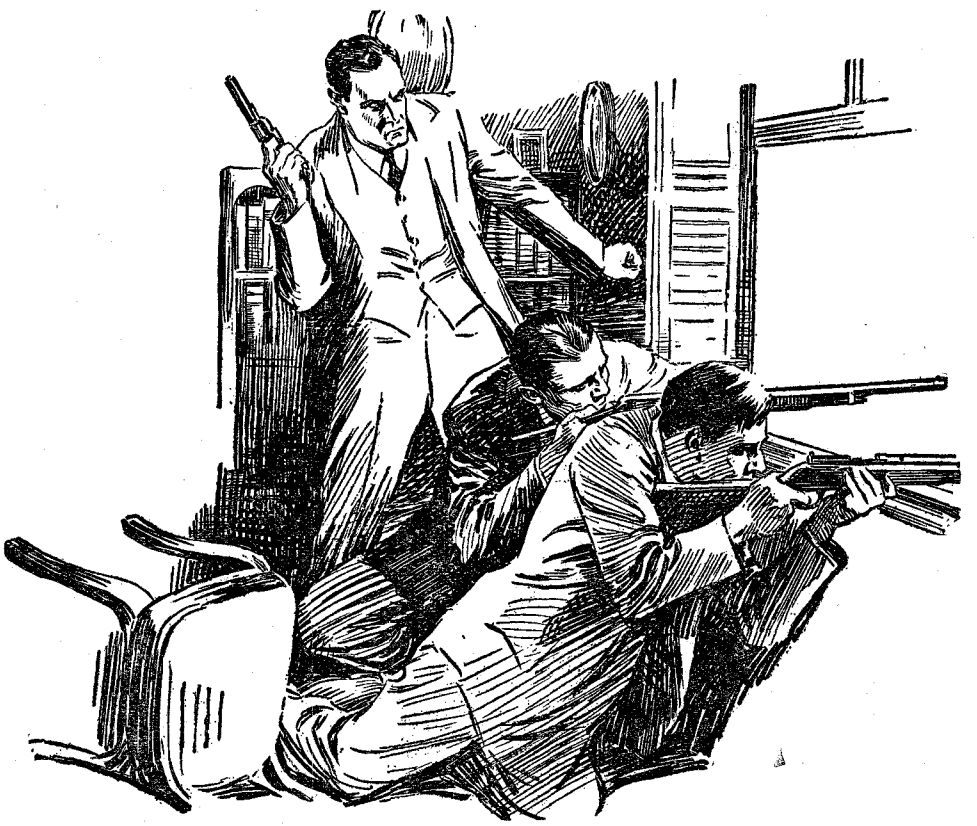
The Secret Room

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

After being tried for murder, Captain Cranford had to face lynching—yet his greatest ordeal was his quarrel with Belle Barrington

THE long freight train rumbled to a stop for water. Little Bitsy Dare—he still called himself that, though his days as a jockey were past forever—rose from a pile of dirty straw in a corner of an empty boxcar, went to one of the almost closed side doors and peered through. Before him lay the square of a very old town in the deep South. It was edged with cabbage palms and magnolias. Bitsy's weary, hungry eyes brightened. Florida, winter haven of hoboes, couldn't be so far away now.

He shifted his gaze to the left and saw the railway station. Pinevale.



"Stop! We don't want to kill you!"

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The name was familiar to him; now where the devil— He cut his eyes to the right and saw the front of a very old courthouse. About it red-dusted automobiles stood thickly. At one of two sun-cracked hitch-posts, relics of the pre-gasoline age, there was a single horse, saddled. That horse was familiar, too! Coal-black, with three white feet and a white halfmoon in its face. Sleek, too fat, but there was speed in its legs yet. Small ears, neck bowed proudly.

A thoroughbred if ever there was a thoroughbred.

"Gosh!" exploded Bitsy Dare. "Old White Stockin's! Cap'n Tom Cranford's White Stockin's! *Anything* can happen!"

In all his riding, there'd been but one horse that he actually loved, and this was that horse. He forgot all about Florida, forgot the hunger that gnawed inside him as a rat gnaws cheese. Bracing his slight body against the doorframe, he shoved the door open a foot more; then he sprang—almost into the arms of a lanky, sour-visaged policeman.

"Well, well!" growled the cop, seizing Dare's unwashed wrists. "Where do you think you're goin', sonny?"

Bitsy swallowed. "Cap'n Tom Cranford—he lives here, don't he?"

The name was as magic. Instantly Dare's wrists were freed.

"Not right in Pinevale," said the bluecoat, "but a few miles out, on a big cotton plantation. Cap'n Tom is bein' tried over at the courthouse now, for murder. You know him; eh?"

Little Dare spoke eagerly. "Know him? I sh'd say I do." He pointed. "See that horse, White Stockin's? I rode him to a fortune for Cap'n Cranford three years ago at Churchill Downs. I got to see Cap'n Tom if I never do anything else. On trial for murder, you say? Listen, cop. He wouldn't do that. He's the best man on earth. Say—tell me about it, will you?"

The officer grinned sadly. "Son, you took in a sight o' territory when you said Tom Cranford was the best man on earth, but you might be right at that. I like him, too. Nearly everybody does. The killin'—but I reckon I'd better go back to the beginnin', so you'll understand everything:

"Some years ago, young Cap'n Tom throws up his Army commission and comes home to marry Miss Belle Barrington, who lives on a big plantation close to his. But they fell out—nobody seems to know what it was over—and he's been a hard sort o' stick, but better-hearted than ever, since then. Drinkin', gamblin', fightin'. Yeah, and horse-racin'. Finally he got to be sort o' mysterious. Keepin' to himself, never goin' anywhere. Wouldn't show himself when anybody'd go to see him.

"And then, there's what they call the secret room. A room in his house, you know, that is kept double-locked, with barred windows. He goes in there, locks himself in, and stays for days at a time. A whisper got out that he was counterfeitin', makin' white-metal Mexican money and platin' it with gold, and sellin' it to a Spanish gang in New Awleens. The whisper traveled wide. Our sheriff went to his house and insisted on goin' into the room—and Tom Cranford throwed him out on his head. A poor-white deputy named Sellars, who Tom had horse-whipped a year before for beatin' up one of his kids, set himself to find out what was in that room. But Sellars went at it the wrong way. He sneaked in at night, and Tom Cranford

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killed him—thought he was a burglar, you see."

"I see," muttered little Bitsy Dare. "What else?"

"Well, the judge put it up to Cranford to tell what he had in that room. Cranford refused to tell, claimed it was nobody else's business what he had in there, claimed a man's home was his castle; and, for a wonder, maybe, the judge agreed with him. The jury's out now—"

Interrupting there came volley upon volley of wild cheers from the throng in the courthouse.

"The jury's in," said the cop. "Thank God, they've cleared him."

CAPTAIN TOM CRANFORD was around thirty-five, tall and lean, hard of face and hard of eye, and devilishly good-looking. The verdict of the jury took a great weight from him, but his countenance didn't show it. The man was iron, all iron. He thanked the jury, spoke briefly with the judge, conferred for a few minutes with his lawyer, then left the courthouse shaking hands right and left.

Bitsy Dare was waiting beside the horse he loved. Cranford's gaze was high. Bitsy faltered: "Cap'n Tom, don't—don't you remember me? Churchill Downs—remember?"

Cranford looked down, stared hard, smiled for the first time in many, many months.

"You little devil, Bitsy," he said in his big barytone voice, "what in hell are you doing here?"

Miss Belle Barrington—two years younger than Cranford, stately and extremely handsome—stood up in her dust-red roadster fifty feet away. She overheard. She saw the god of her 'teens and twenties catch the ragged ex-jockey up and hug him there before very nearly the whole town, put him into the saddle on White Stockings and go leading the horse toward the best hotel.

"Well, I'll be damned—that dirty little tramp!" said Miss Belle to herself. Then, in a softer voice: "But nothing could be so utterly like Tom Cranford as that."

The Cranford plantation home was large and old, had for a setting jasmines and oleanders, magnolias, and ancient, moss-bearded liveoaks. Two hours after Captain Tom's trial was over, he walked with Bitsy Dare up the long steps that led to the high-columned front veranda. Dare was in nice new clothing now, and he carried a stuffed new suitcase besides; his stomach was gorged with good food. He saw a young man in whites like Captain Tom's, and an old black man, pop out the front doorway.

"They cleared you, Tom?" the young man said.

"I told you they would." It came very quietly. "Rivers, you've heard me speak of Bitsy Dare—Churchill Downs, you know. My brother, Bitsy. There's only the two of us now, son. This is to be his home, Rivers, for as long as he wants to stay."

Tom smiled and hastened into the house. Dare found his small right hand caught and pressed warmly. "Welcome, son," Rivers Cranford said. "You look tired. Get his suitcase, Isom, and show him to a corner room upstairs."

It was bewildering to the undersized Bitsy, like a dream—he hoped he'd never wake and find it a dream. He followed old black Isom into a great living room, up a broad staircase, into a wide hallway on the second floor. Another moment, and Dare's alert eyes

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had found a door fitted out with a heavy padlock in addition to the usual mortised lock. The "secret room," of course!

He halted, his jaw slack. So it was true. Isom stopped and turned.

"Whitefolks," Isom whispered, "y'all ain't neveh goin' to find that doah open, suh. But effen y'all does, suh, y'all mustn't go in theah. Know why Cap'n Tom makes Mist' Rivehs stay at home endurin' the trial? To see that no snoopin' folkses don't git into that room, tha's why!"

There was a good deal of boy left in little Dare. His curiosity got the better of him for the time being. "But what's in there, anyway?" he heard himself whispering to the old man.

The eyes of Isom became round. "I'll tell y'all, suh, effen y'all won't tell nobody. No-body! Hit's the devil, suh. The real, jinnywine devil. Cap'n Tom got him chained to the floah!"

DARE blinked. Was Isom trying to scare him with this fool wild tale? Then the ex-jockey shrugged. "What's in that room ain't none o' my business, old-timer. Lead on, will you? I'm so full o' honest-to-goodness grub that I'm about to bust wide open, and so sleepy I'm ready to drop."

The bed was soft and white. Dare slept until dusk had gathered, and woke to the gentle crooning of a plantation melody and the tinkling of a banjo, which came from the quarters of the blacks off behind the "big house." Rivers Cranford came just as Bitsy sat up on the bedside and reached toward a chair for his trousers and shirt. The place had its small electric plant. Rivers switched on a light.

"Supper's ready," he said, "and I don't like to eat by myself."

Bitsy was dressing fast. "But where's Cap'n Tom?"

Young Cranford smiled a little. "He won't be with us, Bitsy."

Dare's face showed disappointment. He blurted: "I wanted to tell him somethin'. Meant to keep it dark, but—but it ain't right. I'm barred on all race tracks now. They 'cused me o' needlin' a horse and throwin' a race. That horse had been needled, but I sure never done it!"

"I can believe that, and Tom will, too," said Rivers with conviction. "About ready to go downstairs with me?"

As they were passing the so-called "secret room" a minute later, Dare noted that the padlock was gone. He remembered the Pinevale cop's telling him that Captain Tom locked himself in there for days at a time. Likely the planter was in there now! Not that Dare believed a word of the counterfeiting tale. It was even more ridiculous than the tale Isom had told him.

After supper, Bitsy and Rivers played cards, and became better acquainted. From widely separated strata of life though they were, they had one thing in common, and this drew them together: each idolized Captain Tom. At last little Dare decided that he might decently put the question: "Say, what was it busted up your brother and his girl?"

Everything went back to that. Rivers became extremely sober. "I never knew anything except that Belle threw Tom down, Bitsy. The fact that she hasn't married either convinces me that she still likes him, though. She became hard, too, for a woman. Runs her plantation with an iron hand, you might say. I—er, think, Bitsy, we'd better go to bed now. I'll show you over the place tomorrow."

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He did. He rode a chestnut gelding, and Dare—to his intense delight—rode White Stockings. Dare was sure that the old race horse remembered him. There is a sameness about endless flat cottonfields, of course. To Bitsy, however, they were quite interesting.

From the southern boundary, marked by a big and sluggish, muddy creek, he could see the ancient Barrington home, which was much like the home of the Cranfords.

The two rode back at noon. The plantation overseer, a thickly set and deeply sunburned man named Jim Ibold, hurried to them at the barnyard watering-trough.

"Mr. Rivers," drawled Ibold, "a strange negro happened in here 'bout a hour ago with news which don't sound so good. He said that Depity Sellars's white-trash kinfolks—and he's got a lot of 'em, y'know, down in the turpentine camps—is b'ilin' mad on account o' the co'te settin' Cap'n Tom free, and is swearin' to come here right off and hang Cap'n Tom theirselves to one o' his own liveoaks!"

"Grapevine news," was young Cranford's comment. "Just as a precaution, though, I'll telephone Sheriff Haney in Pinevale and see what he has to say about it."

"I done tried that, Mr. Rivers," Ibold said, "and I couldn't get Pinevale."

"Mebbe the wire's been cut!" exclaimed little Bitsy Dare.

"Telephone's dead half o' the time anyway," said Ibold. "Y'see, son, the line runs a mile through Dead Swamp, and they's always a dead tree or somethin' fallin' across it. Mr. Rivers, do you think it'd be wise for me to ride to town and see Haney?"

"I guess you'd better. But get your dinner first, Jim. Come along with Bitsy and me."

A BLACK boy had taken charge of the horses. Ibold grinned as he followed Cranford and Dare. He lived alone in a near-by small cottage, and dining in the "big house" was always a bright spot for him.

The three men were just ready to sit down at the long dining table when a corpulent old negress hurried to Cranford and whispered excitedly. The next moment there came from the veranda the light staccato clatter of footsteps, and a few seconds after that the doorway between dining room and living room framed the handsome Belle Barrington!

Rivers stood aghast. Not only had she come to the Cranford home for the first time in years. She had entered without the nice formality of rapping at the door. He noted that her face was drawn. Then she smiled a queer smile, and spoke.

"Taking it rather easy, aren't you, Rivers? I sent a black boy over with news to the effect that the turpentine Sellarses were coming to even their fancied score against your estimable brother by lynching him, and I'll bet you haven't even bothered to tell him of it!—not that *I* care a damn, you understand. Perhaps, Rivers, you don't know those Sellarses as well as I know them."

If she didn't care a damn, thought Dare, why was she here? He heard Cranford saying: "I do know the Sellarses, Belle. Jim Ibold tried to call Sheriff Haney, but the phone was dead. He's riding to town just as soon as he has had his dinner. Jim, maybe you'd better not wait—"

"Never mind," cuttingly said Belle Barrington. "I anticipated just this,

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and I've sent for Haney and some deputies."

"I didn't want to worry Tom until I had to," Cranford said. "He's had enough worry the last month or so."

She whipped around and went hastily toward her roadster. Rivers followed her as far as the veranda steps. She had him so flabbergasted that he couldn't thank her; the words stuck. Bitsy Dare followed into the living room, then turned and ran up the stairs. Captain Tom should be warned.

Although the heavy padlock was not in place on the door of the "secret room," there was no response to Bitsy's knock. It puzzled the ex-jockey. He did not know that the elder Cranford sometimes left the padlock off when he was at home. Bitsy sped back downstairs. He almost ran over old Isom in the living room.

Rivers stood on the upper veranda step and watched Belle Barrington turn her roadster and dash off homeward. Dare brought up two yards behind him. Then Tom Cranford parted blooming vines and stepped to the west end of the veranda.

He was in fresh whites, but he looked worn; his eyes were red, as though from loss of sleep.

"Late for dinner, eh?" He tried to smile. "Out for a walk, and went too far. I heard a car, Rivers. Whose was it?"

"Belle Barrington's!" Rivers said. He told all there was to tell. Captain Tom shrugged. Then, soberly:

"But there must be something to it, or she wouldn't have bothered. Come to think of it, I'm surprised that she bothered, as it is! Maybe we'd better get ready for the war party, boys. There's my Army pistol, and the high-power deer rifle, and Jim Ibold's two-barreled shotgun. Bitsy, you can be the lookout, watching in all directions from the upstairs windows."

THE plantation overseer had come out. He heard, and went for his shotgun. Five minutes later, the two Cranfords and Ibold were ready for the enemy. Dare kept watch faithfully from windows upstairs. A score of blacks were leaving their quarters for the fields. Dare wondered why Captain Tom had not seen fit to use them in fighting the Sellarses.

There was a step behind Bitsy, and he jumped in spite of himself. It was only Isom. The old Negro had a Civil War muzzle-loader musket.

"Y'all take this, Mist' Bitsy," Isom urged. "And when y'all go to shoot hit, brace yo'se'f, suh, bekase she'll kick jes' lack a cottonfiel' mule. She's loaded with nails 'stid o' bullets. She'd might' neah cut a tree down, suh, Mist' Bitsy, I s'pects."

"Hope they're big nails," Dare said, taking the weapon. He knew only a little about guns.

Isom hurried downstairs and persuaded the Cranfords and Ibold to have dinner, one at a time, then sent a black girl to the second floor with a tray of food for Dare, who ate walking post. Another half hour passed before the Sellarses, brothers and cousins—nine lanky and scraggly-bearded stalwarts, all armed, all in the grip of insane rage born of blood lust and swamp moon whisky—came creeping out of the fencerow scrub to the left of the driveway entrance.

Bitsy Dare saw them first. He let out a shrill cry.

"There they come, Cap'n Tom! Left o' the front! Watch out now, Cap'n Tom!"

The two Cranfords were at open living room windows, Tom with his

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Army Colt and Rivers with the high-power sporting rifle. Jim Ibold heard Bitsy's warning yell, and hastened with his shotgun to the younger Cranford's side. The Sellarses, also, had heard Dare's warning yell. They straightened and rushed boldly toward the house. The defenders could see that the foremost of the nine carried a plowline rope coiled about his waist. Bitsy Dare leveled the ancient musket across a windowsill. Isom spoke shakily from a point somewhere in the room behind him.

"Don't shoot too soon, whitefolks! That theah ole mustick, she scatteh's to beat eve'thing!"

Downstairs, Tom Cranford was calling to the enemy: "Stop! We don't want to kill you. Stop!"

The Sellarses, doubtless, had hoped to come upon the house unseen. They dove in a body for the shelter of an oleander-and-jasmine copse, and were out of sight from the lower-floor windows. Bitsy Dare, however, could see them plainly enough from his high point of vantage. The man with the rope wound about his middle wheeled and spoke in a low voice to the man nearest him. This fellow fished a paper bag from inside his cotton shirt, took from the bag a kerosene-soaked ball of cotton, and produced a match.

At oncy Bitsy divined their intention. The roof of the Cranford house had a low pitch, was of wooden shingles and tinder-dry. They were going to drive Captain Tom into the open by means of fire! It struck Dare like a mailed fist. He rested the barrel of the old Springfield on the windowsill, took hasty aim at the bulk of them, and pulled the trigger.

The gun bellowed like a cannon, and kicked Bitsy halfway across the room. The back of his head struck a marble dressertop corner. He sank, as limp as a boiled rag, to the floor beside the musket.

IT seemed to him that he had been out for a very long time, when he came to. On a living room couch, he was, and there were people hovering about him—the brothers Cranford, a doctor, the sheriff, Jim Ibold, and old Isom. He noted that Captain Tom's head was bandaged, and that Rivers had an arm in a sling.

"Did—did we lick 'em?" Bitsy asked. There was a queer, far off ring to his voice.

He had addressed the elder of the Cranfords. The answer came at once: "You bet, we licked 'em, son, thanks to the fine start you gave us. Doc Lynn has just finished cutting a pound of nails, more or less, out of the Sellarses—they're all on the veranda now, in charge of Sheriff Haney's deputies. You feel pretty good, Bitsy, considering?"

"Bully." Dare made a brave attempt to grin. He put a hand to his head, which was swathed in a smelly bandage. "All but my bean aches, and my shoulder feels like a circus elephant had stepped on it. That there old cannon that I shot—"

"No wonder Isom didn't have the nerve to fire it." Captain Tom's smile went suddenly pale, vanished altogether. The Sellars' bullet that had creased his temple had given him a terrific shock. He glanced at Dr. Lynn, motioned toward Bitsy. "Look after him, Doc; will you?"

Lynn assured him that he would. Tom Cranford turned unsteadily to the stairs. The doctor, Ibold, and young Rivers sprang after him. He waved them back.

"I'll be all right after a little while.

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Going upstairs to lie down. No—don't follow me!"

Reluctantly they permitted him to go on alone. Sheriff Haney went out to the veranda to take up with his deputies the problem of transferring the nine prisoners, all of whom were more or less wounded, to the Pinevale jail.

Jim Ibold turned to little Dare. Bitsy spoke:

"Them cops get here in time to do anything?"

"Yeah," Ibold said—"in time to pick up the pieces. You and Cap'n Tom done the fightin'. Cap'n Tom stepped out there with that Army Colt o' his'n—looked like he almost wanted to get killed—shot it empty and then took a Sellars' rifle for a club and nearly beat their heads off with it. You'd done blasted 'em full o' nails with Isom's old musket, and that helped a sight. My gun was loaded with birdshot, and the high-power rifle jammed."

Bitsy sat up on the couch. He was dizzy for a few seconds. Then he rose and made for the stairway. Rivers Cranford, the doctor, and Ibold called to him to come back. He ignored them, went on, holding to the rail.

He found the door of the "secret room" unlocked, opened it and went in. The shades were drawn, and he couldn't see very well. At last his eyes made out the still form of Tom Cranford on a couch much like that on which he had lain in the living room. Bitsy knelt beside it.

"Cap'n Tom?"

It came almost in a whisper. Cranford's voice was low and indescribably weary.

"You shouldn't have followed me here, Bitsy. Please, go out and close the door. Sometimes I can't sleep, and I didn't sleep last night. I think—perhaps—I can sleep now."

EVEN in the dim light, Dare could see that he was very pale. It made Bitsy anxious. Swiftly his mind reviewed things. Women had never entered into the scheme of life for him—he held most of them in contempt, as a matter of cold fact—but he realized now that Tom Cranford's split with Belle Barrington years before had wrought certain havoc with him. Some fool quarrel, of course—which was a first-rate guess. Then old and very stiff pride on both sides. If he could but get them together in a crisis, even such a crisis as this.

"Your girl," Bitsy Dare faltered—"Cap'n Tom, wouldn't you like to see her now? I'll go after her—"

"No!" vehemently interrupted Cranford. "Bitsy, if you were to do such a thing, I'd never even look at you again! Remember, my boy, you've got a good home here."

He closed his eyes. Bitsy bent nearer, couldn't even see that he was breathing. Then he rose, cheeks blanching, and left the room.

There was an outside stairway at the rear, he knew. He stole down it and went to the barn, put a bridle on old White Stockings and somehow managed to get himself up to the animal's bare back. Then he rode for the Barrington place, cutting across a cottonfield in order that he might not be seen from the house. This would probably cost him the friendship of the best man he had ever known, as well as the only real home he'd ever had. Well—all right!

The sounds of the firing had reached Belle's ears. She was now on the front veranda, pacing it restlessly. When the old race horse had drawn up at the

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gate, she hurried down, and she paled in spite of herself at sight of Dare's bandage.

"What happened over there?"

Her voice was not quite steady. Bitsy's head reeled, and his bruised shoulder gave him a twinge of pain.

"You Belle Barrington?"

"Yes. Will you answer my question?"

"Plenty happened over there," he told her jerkily. "Say, you was a damn fool for turnin' down anybody like Cap'n Tom. Yeah, I sure said it. Damn crazy fool! If you'd had the sense of a louse—"

"You insolent little tramp!"

"All right, all right! Sure, I'm a tramp. But we ain't talkin' about me now. We're talkin' about Cap'n Tom. He was shot bad, and might be he's goin' to die. Don't you think you—you—you ought to go to see him?"

She caught her breath, bit her lip, turned and ran for her roadster. One more minute, and the light machine went roaring up the sand-clay road. Dare followed, walking the horse, thinking, thinking. Chances were his trick wouldn't work. He wasn't going to risk staying to see whether it worked or not. He'd leave White Stockings at the gate, hoof it to Pinevale, and hop a freight for Florida.

More than an hour afterward, Rivers Cranford found the horse standing in front of the house, and with the aid of Belle and Tom pieced the thing together. Rivers, in the Barrington roadster, overtook Bitsy Dare some two miles out on the Pinevale road. Dare halted, faced right, blinked uncertainly.

"We're not going to let you do this, kid," said young Cranford, happily.

Dare blinked once more. "It—it didn't work, did it?"

"Like a charm," said Rivers. "Tom needed a balance-wheel. He's got one now. Belle thought he was going to die, at first. And then she saw what was in that room. Climb in here with me, Bitsy. They're waiting, back at the house, and they're anxious."

"Miss Belle too?" Bitsy had, he remembered, called her a certain kind of fool.

"Miss Belle especially," Rivers told him. "She'll probably hug you on sight, Bitsy!"

"Well, mebbe it won't hurt much." Dare climbed to the seat beside Tom's brother. He asked, as Rivers turned the little car: "Say, what *was* in that room, anyway?"

"You've earned the right to know, Bitsy—

"It's just pictures, lots and lots of 'em. Walls lined with 'em. Some of 'em enlarged. Little photos of Tom and Belle that they took a long time ago; a sort of record from the time when they were fifteen up to the very day when they quarreled over nothing. You can understand why Tom didn't want anybody to go in there. Not that he's soft. He's just human, that's all."

"You're tellin' me!" said Bitsy.

THE END

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Heading Boss

By BORDEN CHASE

Blaster was fighting more than New York's East River—he was struggling to keep the woman he loved from the electric chair

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN Blaster, the big heading boss, decided he was going to drive a tunnel beneath the Rio Blanco Diablo in South America, he was determined that neither hell nor high water should stop him. Neither did, although Blaster had to kill a man who stood in his way. He was arrested by the military authorities, but he gained his freedom through the efforts of Lottie Thomas, a hotel keeper who had fled the States to avoid a murder charge. Lottie had been accused of killing her husband, but she knew she wasn't guilty.

Accompanied by Mutt Jackson, his constant companion, Blaster returned to New York, and the two tunnel men immediately found work on a tube being driven under the East River.

Suddenly Blaster received a frantic call for help from Lottie. She was in the Tombs Prison, awaiting trial on the murder charge. Her son, who was in school near by, had fallen ill, and Lottie had come to help him. Blaster went to see her. Now he is returning to the job.

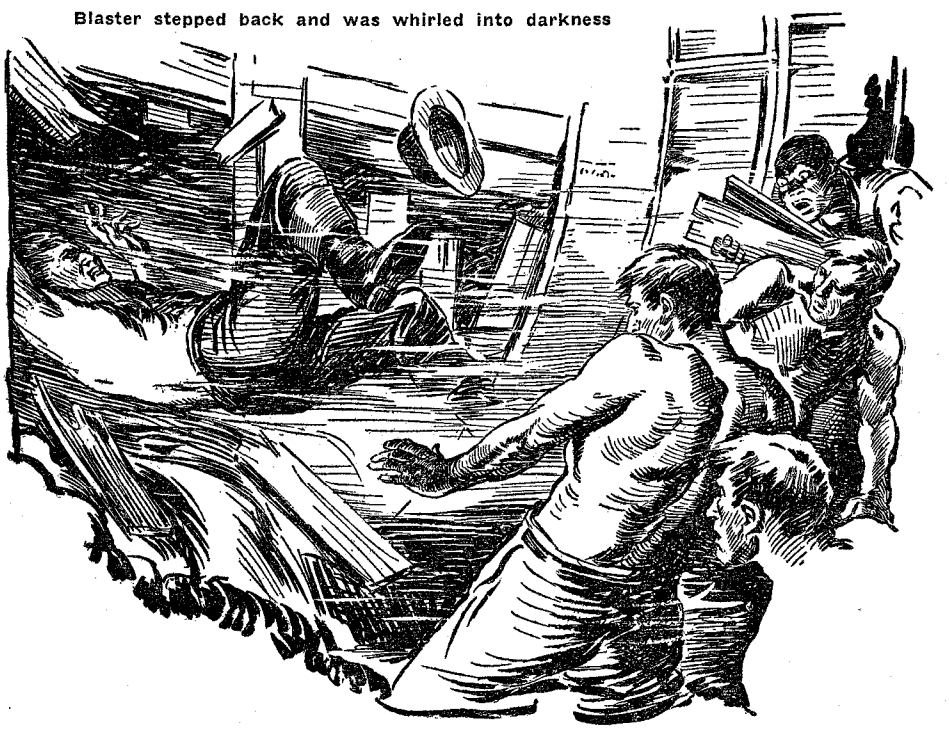
CHAPTER X.

TO THE RESCUE.

MUTT was pacing nervously upon the gantry when Blaster's cab arrived at the job.

"Why didn't you phone?" he called

Blaster stepped back and was whirled into darkness



This story began in the Argosy for June 1

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down. "You worn-out imitation of a half-wit! I been goin' nuts. Come up here and tell me about it."

"I'm comin'," said Blaster as he climbed the stair. "And I'll let you know all about it later. Right now I gotta get some money—a big chunk of it. Where's Albert?"

"Inside, changin' his clothes."

"Come on," said Blaster and headed for the superintendent's office.

Wilson had just stepped from under the showers as naked as the day of his birth, save for a pair of rubbers. He was methodically scrubbing his teeth.

"Now what?" he barked through a smother of tooth paste. "Well, come on—'urry up and say it! And don't leave that blahsted door open!"

"I need a few hundred bucks, Albert," said Blaster. "And I'm goin' to be gone a few days."

"My sainted aunt!" roared Wilson. "So it's money you want and time off to drink it up, eh? Now look 'ere, my blinkin' son, you'll not 'ave a cent. And if you 'op off on any benders I'll tie a can to your tail. Mind you!"

"Albert, I've never lied to you yet," said Blaster, and his tone was so serious the super closed a half-open mouth from which words of abuse had started on an endless flow. He reached for a towel, draped it about his shoulders and listened as Blaster continued. "You've always wanted me to quit the rum. All right—I'll make a deal with you. Lend me five hundred and give me three days off and I won't touch another drop till the end of the job. And if you think I've been driving tunnel up to now, just wait till you see what I do when I get back."

"What's up?" barked Wilson. "Out with it! Something's up to drag a promise like that from you."

"I can't tell you. Do I get the money?"

"Of course—you silly idiot," said Wilson. "Five 'undred enough?"

Blaster nodded and Wilson paddled across the office to his locker. He searched for a check book and hastily scrawled a check. He handed it to Blaster and said, "If you break that promise I'll break your blinkin' neck. Get out of here!"

ON the way to their furnished room, Blaster told Mutt of his visit to Lottie. He showed him a copy of a newspaper in which all the details of her supposed crime were printed. There was a picture, taken when she stepped from the steamer and into the hands of the New York detectives. There were pictures too, of the various members of the Carington family taken at Newport, Miami, and other places frequented by the socially prominent. An old photograph of Thomas Carington in his uniform of cavalry captain emphasizing a half dozen citations gained in the World War, was run beside that of Lottie. He was spoken of as a hero, one who had sought to lift an obscure singer to the heights of society and who had been repaid with a crushed head.

Lottie was painted as a woman possessed of the fury of a tiger. The fact that she had been hiding in an out of the way corner of South America lent color to the tale. San Miguel was described as a roistering frontier town in the tropics. And an illustrator cursed with a vivid imagination had sketched Lottie upon a table top, conducting an orgy of drunken half-breeds.

Usually a woman on trial for her life was given a saintly aspect by the newspapers. She was pitied, befriended, and public sentiment was cajoled in her behalf. But the writer who had coined her new name—Tiger Girl—had sent the papers off upon a different tangent.

They dwelt upon her supposed ferocity, the fierceness of her crime, her utter lack of feeling and the brooding hatred that shone from her eyes. She was a wanton and poor Thomas Carington had been a hero. She had killed him and the newspapers had tried her case. They found her guilty and howled for the acquiescence of the courts.

Mutt and Blaster sat in their dingy furnished room reading the columns of lies, cursing at every breath and praying some day they would be locked in a room with a dozen reporters.

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"We gotta get her out of there," said Blaster. "We gotta! First we need a lawyer, like the captain said. It's up to you to take care of that. Get a couple of hundred from the boys and find a good lawyer—the best in the country. Tell him we'll pay him double. And then take him over to see Lottie."

"Did she say anything about me when you were there?" asked Mutt.

"Yeah. She sent you a kiss and asked about you right away," answered Blaster. "She'll be glad to see you—she's lonesome."

"She's a swell girl," said Mutt. "If those newspaper blokes knew her like we do, they'd sing a different tune. But what can we do? If we tried to put 'em straight they'd get wise to her kid."

"That's all she worries about," said the heading boss. "She don't seem to care about herself—just the kid. I wonder if he's worth it? Maybe he's like his old man."

"You'll find out in the morning."

"Yeah, I'll find out," said Blaster.

IT was close to noon of the following day when Blaster entered the principal's office at Manly School. He had dressed himself carefully in a combination of his own and Mutt's clothes before taking the night train to Albany. And on the drive to the school he had spent a furious half hour digging at his grime encrusted nails. He was nervous. And he had invented and discarded a thousand stories to explain his presence to the principal. He stood before the wide, smooth topped desk awkwardly twisting his hat. He cleared his throat.

"I—I came to see about Thomas Carr," he said. "How is he?"

"Won't you sit down, Mr.—er—" asked the principal. "I am Doctor Handon, as you no doubt know."

Doctor Handon was tall and stooped. He looked as though his shoulders had bent beneath the weight of a shaggy mop of iron-gray hair. His features were large and his jaw protruded in an aggressive manner. Blaster didn't like him.

"We have been trying to get in touch with Mrs. Carr for quite some time," continued Handon. "We received a letter from her just after her son was taken ill. Since that time we have heard nothing."

"Well, it's this way," said Blaster. He drew a deep breath and launched into his tale. "Mrs. Carr has a few forests up in the rubber country. There's been trouble up there and things are all shot to pieces. So she decided to go up and get things straightened out, herself. She's funny like that. Always has to do things herself. Of course she knew there was nothing serious about Tommy and—"

"On the contrary," interrupted Handon. "Although he has recovered, the boy was dangerously ill."

"That's just why I'm here," blurted the heading boss. "I was just leaving a job in San Miguel and she asked me to stop in and find out all about Tommy. You never can depend on the mail in that country and Mrs. Carr figured it was best for me to find out personally. I got a friend going back there and he can take the message. Things are always sort of unsettled in San Miguel."

"Rather an odd place, that," said the principal. "Quite a bit of scandal and filth in the papers about some woman from that very town, isn't there?"

"Is there?" asked Blaster slowly. "I didn't read it."

"Unfortunately, I did," said Handon. "And I also made some inquiries."

"Meanin' what?" snapped Blaster.

"Why—er—our school maintains a very high standard. And if I have been correctly informed, Mrs. Carr has been misleading us. It appears that she is—"

"Shut up!" roared Blaster. He was on his feet, leaning across the desk and staring into the eyes of Handon. His hands were doubled into ponderous fists and the knuckles shone white against the polished surface. "I know what you're goin' to say—but don't say it. And take a tip from Blaster—if you ever open your trap to anyone about what you know, I'll break your damn back. You know I'm not bluffin', don't you?"

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"Yes, I do," said Handon. "And I have no intention of saying anything to anyone. It would hardly be good advertising for the school. But under the circumstances I am afraid we shall no longer be able to keep Thomas with us."

"You mean you're kickin' him out?" growled Blaster.

"Well, hardly that, but you see—"

"You're damn right, I see. G'wan—get t'hell out of here and bring back the kid. Pack his trunk, too, while you're at it. I wouldn't let him spend another night in your lousy school if you paid me."

"This is rather irregular," said Handon. "Just who are you?"

"I'm his uncle," lied Blaster. "Want a birth certificate to prove it?"

"Ordinarily we don't do such things. But due to the unfortunate circumstances—"

"Quit mumblin' and get that kid!"

THE principal left and the giant sand hog paced the room savagely. His mind was a whirl of confusing thoughts. He did not dare let himself attempt to think logically. Things always happened too quickly with Blaster to take an orderly position in his mind. Situations developed that were entirely different from those he had planned. He did some little thing or said some inconsequential word and—*wham!* Before he had time to draw a breath he was whirled along into maelstrom.

He had come to inquire about Tommy's health, pay a few doctor's bills, and return with a cheering word to Lottie. Now he was an uncle. And in addition to that, his nephew, a fine, masculine little chap of ten years, was standing before him with extended hand, saying, "How do you do, sir."

Blaster seemed to hear the principal's voice coming from a great distance as it said, "This gentleman is your uncle, Thomas." He saw a pair of blue eyes staring questioningly up into his and he caught himself studying a replica of Lottie's face. There was that same odd expression that came into Lottie's eyes when she was puzzled.

"Hello, Tommy," he said huskily. "Guess you don't remember me, but I'd know you in a million. Your mother asked me to come and get you—thought you might like to start your vacation a little early this year. Think it's a good idea?"

"You bet I do!" cried Tommy. "Are we going right down to South America to see mom?"

Blaster was glad the boy had called Lottie "mom." It was the name he had used for his own mother and it seemed to fit Lottie well. He grinned and ruffled the boy's hair. Then noticed a pair of suitcases on the floor. He grabbed one in each hand and turned to Handon.

"Phone for a cab," he ordered. "I let mine go. And tell one of your monkeys to hustle that trunk along."

"The cab is waiting and so is the trunk," said Handon. "I wish you good day."

Blaster hustled Tommy through the door, closed and then re-opened it to thrust his head into the office.

"Remember what I told you," he said to Handon, and slammed the door.

He steadied himself with an effort as he found the eyes of Tommy upon him. He forced a smile and when the boy grinned Blaster's sense of humor returned and sent him into gales of laughter.

"Guess that will hold him," he chuckled.

"What was the trouble?" asked Tommy.

"Aw, nothin' much," answered Blaster. "The Doc and me had a little argument about what was right and what was wrong. So I bawled him out. And just between you and me, Tommy—I don't like that guy."

"Neither do I," agreed Tommy.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW VISTAS.

BLASTER hustled the youngster into the cab and as they were driven to the railroad station he prepared himself for some of the most convincing story

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telling of his career. And the first question was not long in coming.

"Are we really going to South America?" asked Tommy.

"Well, now, I'll tell you," said Blaster as he drew a long breath. "We're goin'—see? But first I got a surprise for you. Your mother's been fussing about you being cooped up in that old school. She figures it's about time you got around to seeing a few things. And she asked me to take care of it. Fer instance—I'll bet you never saw a tunnel."

"Guess I never did," said Tommy. "But first I want to see mom. Gee—I never did see her, you know. She's always been so busy at those rubber plantations. And she never would let me come home on my vacations." He paused, stared silently from the window as though in thought and then continued with all the seriousness of a ten year old who confides something to an elder. "All the other fellows at school used to go home—just for a week sometimes—then they'd come back for summer camp. And all of them had seen their mothers."

This was getting dangerous, thought Blaster. It was time for him to do the talking, not Tommy.

"Tommy, that's one of the nice things about your mother," he said. "She's wonderful. And thoughtful, too. She would say, 'Blaster, I've got to see Tommy. I'm going up to the States and visit him.' Then I'd say to her, 'Things is pretty bad right now. If you do, maybe there'll be trouble on the plantation, then you wouldn't have money enough to get Tommy all the things he wants.' And she'd say, 'Yeah, guess I'll have to stay and work.' That was pretty fine, wasn't it, Tommy?"

"Sure it was," said Tommy. And then as an afterthought, "Do you work on the plantation?"

"Huh—er— Oh, no. I work on a tunnel right near your mother's place. And sometimes I go to her house to see her."

"Is it a nice house?"

"Oh, boy!" said Blaster, feeling he was now on safer ground. "It's one of the finest houses in the world. It's big, and long, and got lots of rooms. There's stables in the back and there's loads of horses."

"Will I ride the horses?"

"You just bet! We'll both ride 'em. And your mom rides swell."

"Is she pretty?" asked Tommy.

"She's the most beautiful woman in the world," said Blaster with the utmost conviction. "Her hair is all gold and her eyes are blue—like yours. And when she smiles it seems like the sun had just come out and started shining. Everybody loves her, and so will you."

"I do," said Tommy gravely. "Do you?"

"I'd give her my right arm," blurted the heading boss.

"Why?"

"Aw, that's just a way of saying I love her."

"You should, you know," said Tommy thoughtfully. "'Cause you're my uncle."

"Yeah, that's right," said Blaster. "And you're goin' to meet another uncle soon."

"Where?"

"Soon as we get to Brooklyn. He's building a tunnel there and I work with him."

"Thought you worked near mother," said Tommy.

THINGS were coming too fast for Blaster. He had never found any difficulty in spinning a yarn to a group of men. But the simple directness of the boy's questions left him gasping for breath. He welcomed the stop at the railroad station as a gift from the gods. And when he found that a train was due within a few minutes, he heaved a monstrous sigh of relief.

Never in his life had he longed for the company of Mutt as he did during that trip to New York. He talked himself into and out of dozens of difficult situations. And by the time they reached the Grand Central Terminal, Tommy was convinced his wonderful mother had arranged a sight-seeing tour that would delight the heart of any ten year old. The two uncles were going to show him all the wonders of the world—

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he was to see tall buildings, bridges, movies, shows and to cap the climax he was going to watch them build a tunnel.

All of this was very grand. It was even finer to have this great giant for an uncle. Of course, the candy and ice-cream made him a little sickish. And at times a sort of lump would bob up in the back of his throat when he realized he was not going to see his mother for another month or two. But on the whole, it was a new and wonderful experience to a young fellow who had spent all of his life, at least to his knowledge, in a strict military school.

It was late when Blaster and Tommy stepped from the train and climbed the long concrete runway leading into the station proper. And the throngs of people stilled the many unanswered questions that came to Tommy's mind. He heard Blaster mumbling something about checking a trunk, then jumped gleefully into another taxi while the huge man stood scratching his chin and staring at the driver.

Blaster had nearly reached the end of his rope. He knew the furnished room shared by himself and Mutt would not be the proper place for Tommy. And when the driver had asked, "Where to?" Blaster had wanted to reply, "Yeah—where?"

"Take us to the St. Thomas Hotel in Brooklyn," he said at length. "And make it fast."

AS they rolled down Fourth Avenue and over the Brooklyn Bridge, he realized something would have to be done about the care of this newly acquired nephew. It was a problem with which he could not cope unaided. He needed Mutt—needed him badly. And he would have to see him somewhere other than in the presence of young Tommy. And then, when he turned to look at his youthful companion, he knew the gods had smiled. Tommy was asleep in the corner of the cab.

Blaster leaned forward very cautiously. He turned down the front window and tapped the driver upon the shoulder.

"Shhh!" he whispered. "Take it easy. Stop at a drug store for a minute. And if you wake up this kid I'll twist your neck."

"What's the matter?" asked the driver.

"Shut up—you ape!" said Blaster. "Do as I tell you."

They drew up before a store and Blaster raced to a phone booth. There was a telephone in the hall of their furnished room house and after a short wait, Mutt was summoned by the landlady.

"Now what?" he barked.

"Meet me at the St. Thomas—in the lobby," said Blaster. "And don't stand there asking foolish questions."

"What the—"

"Hurry up," insisted Blaster. "And get some decent lookin' clothes on you, too. Be quick!"

He hurried back to the cab and cautiously slipped inside. At the door of the hotel he instructed the driver to wait and again promised him a twisted neck if he should awaken the boy.

MUTT was in the lobby and his eyes widened as he listened to Blaster's tale. He thought for a moment and then walked to the desk. Blaster followed him.

"What are we goin' to do?" asked the heading boss. "Say something, can't you?"

"Aw, shut up," said Mutt. "You can dig up more trouble in one day than anybody I ever heard of."

"What else could I do?" said Blaster. "They were wise to Lottie. Beside, I didn't like the joint."

"You wouldn't," growled Mutt, and turned to the clerk. "We want some rooms—two of 'em and nice ones."

"I can let you have a very nice suite for forty dollars," said the clerk. "It's one of our studio apartments."

"Ain't that lovely," said Blaster. "What made you think we were artists?"

"Ignore him," Mutt advised the clerk and scribbled his name upon the registry card. He nodded to a bell boy, caught Blaster by the arm and went out to the taxi.

"Nice lookin' kid, ain't he?" he said

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as he looked in at the sleeping boy. "A ringer for Lottie—same hair and everything. The poor little egg. Think you can carry him without spillin' him?"

For answer, Blaster lifted the youngster, carried him across the lobby and into the elevator. The bell boy showed them to a nicely appointed suite and Blaster deposited Tommy gently upon the bed.

"Gotta get his clothes off without waking him," he said.

"Leave him alone for a while," said Mutt. "Come in the other room—I got something to tell you."

"What's up?" asked Blaster when the two men were alone.

"Wilson helped me dig up a swell lawyer," said Mutt. "But it's no use. Lottie wouldn't tell him a thing and when we were alone she asked me to lay off."

"Why?"

"Afraid something might come out about Tommy. She thinks a hell of a lot more of that kid than she does of her life. And the lawyer says we're licked if she don't open up. He fixed it so you could see her tomorrow and he's trying to get an early trial like she asked him."

"Aw, Mutt, couldn't you do anything with her?" asked Blaster. "She thinks a lot of you—thinks you got brains and everything. She'd listen to you."

"No, she won't. And the papers are murdering her. Every edition is worse than the one before. I don't know what we're going to do."

"Maybe I can get her to put up a fight tomorrow—after I tell her about Tommy," said Blaster. "C'mon in with me and lets see if we can get him into bed."

"I ain't worried about that," said Mutt. "Tomorrow's what's got me stopped. Who's goin' to look after the kid while we're working?"

"We'll dig up a nurse—or something," said Blaster.

THE following morning when Tommy awoke he had a complete set of questions to ask his new Uncle Mutt at breakfast. Blaster gulped his food, patted Tommy upon the head, cheerfully dropped a roll into Mutt's coffee and hurried off to see Lottie.

Her appearance frightened him. She was pale. And heavy rings had grown beneath her eyes. Her fingers twisted nervously as she crossed the room toward him.

"Did you see him?" she asked. "Is he all right?"

Blaster lied valiantly. He said that he had spent an entire day with Tommy—seen him play baseball, listened to the praises of the teachers, and had had a long talk with the doctor. He assured her the boy was in perfect health, perfectly happy and one of the honor students of the school. As he talked, he could see new life pouring into Lottie. She watched the words as they came from his lips, seeming to race ahead of his speech, looking for the thought behind it. She made him repeat the things Tommy was supposed to have said, heard his description of the boy a half dozen times, asked a thousand intimate questions about the little things Blaster had failed to notice. But the heading boss did not fail her.

When stuck for a fact he invented a piece of fiction and the eagerness of his listener covered any discrepancies in the tale. He finished it off with a glowing description of Tommy's enthusiasm at the prospect of spending another summer at camp. And for the first time, he detected a glimmer of doubt in Lottie's eyes.

"Blaster, you've told me the truth, haven't you?" she asked.

"Only the truth," he said. "And, Lottie, if I've told you a single lie I hope the damn river gets me on my next shift."

"Thanks, Blaster," she said.

"But what's this stuff Mutt's been telling me?" he asked. "You can't do that, Lottie. You gotta put up a fight."

"I'm afraid to," she said. "Afraid for Tommy's sake."

"But if you don't," he persisted, "what's goin' to become of the kid? Who's goin' to make him a gentleman like you want?"

"Oh, God!" she cried. "I don't know. And that's what is driving me mad."

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Blaster saw his only argument torn from him by the sorrow of the woman he loved. He knew he should keep on with this argument. He realized it was his only hope. But the anguish in Lottie's face whipped him.

"Forget it, Lottie," he said. "Don't worry about it any more. You know I'll see the kid through. I'm off the booze now and it's a sure thing for me to be a super on the next job. And besides, if anything happened to me, Mutt would take care of Tommy."

Lottie did not answer with words. She stared at Blaster silently and long. And her eyes said things that brought a tightness to Blaster's throat. He gripped her hands and his twisted smile was a sorry reflection of her own.

She kissed him before he left and the warmth of her lips stayed fresh upon his own for hours.

That night he leaned above Tommy as the boy slept. And the great hulk of a man bent gently and passed the kiss along from mother to son. He turned and grinned foolishly to find Mutt watching him. And two men smiled in understanding.

CHAPTER XII.

RIVALRY.

YOUNG Tommy drifted through the weeks that followed as though in a dream. His two uncles more than made good their promises. Each day was more wonderful than the previous. And the two sand hogs fought and argued continually for the boy's company. If Mutt had decided to visit the zoo, Blaster had bought tickets for a ball game. The nurse who was hired to take care of the youngster was kept in a frenzy of despair. She claimed to have thrown out tons of candy and gallons of ice-cream. She refused to attempt to keep his clothes free from grease stains acquired at the job. And she threatened both Blaster and Mutt with instant destruction if they violated the eight thirty curfew set for Tommy.

Each day there was a conference with the lawyer and as often as possible he arranged for the men to see Lottie. Blaster invented a dozen imaginary trips to both the school and the summer camp and painted them in vivid colors for the woman he loved. The newspapers had shunted the story to the back pages, but as the time of the trial grew nearer there was more and more mention made of the case. Once again the Tiger Girl flared into the headlines and again her case was tried and lost in print. The lawyer pleaded—Mutt pleaded—Blaster pleaded, but to no avail. Lottie was adamant in her refusal to offer any defense and the lawyer despaired of obtaining an impartial jury.

At the job Blaster evoked the wonder of his employers. He was working now as they had always known he could work. He was driving tunnel. Driving the men with curses that cut and fists that punished. He seemed like a man half mad or half drunk. And only Wilson knew the reason behind it all. But Wilson never talked. And as the days passed he watched the record of progress rolled up by Blaster's gang. He smiled when Scotty McLean and a group of giant blacks wandered into the hog house and casually asked for their boss. They had followed Blaster from San Miguel as they had followed him all over the world. They were with him now beneath the East River, driving, cursing, fighting the river and eating high air.

Mutt was in his old place in the center pocket. Dusty, a monstrous Senegalese, was running the iron gang. And Blaster leaped about from place to place in the heading, watching, advising, never missing a movement of the men.

A ring of iron had been erected and the giant Negroes were swinging their wrenches, tightening the bolts of the circle. Wet river mud was streaming from the lower pockets as the miners' helpers swept it back onto the lower platform. The muckers caught it deftly with their shovels and sent it streaming into waiting muck cars in an unending flood. Fog curled lazily about their naked shoulders and the clang of

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shovels beat a constant rhythm against the booming note of incoming air.

THERE were forty pounds of pressure in the tunnel. Forty pounds of concentrated energy pressing against each square inch of surface of the tube. It was an unseen power holding the river in check and in turn being held in a delicate balance. It lifted slightly at times and again it lowered. Each fall of the pressure was marked by an increase of the ever present fog that partially obscured the actions of the men.

They were stripped to the waist and sweat dripped from their shoulders. The fierceness of their exertions was expressed in a chorus of deep chested grunts. The heat was so terrific it seemed like a live thing, wrapping the sand hogs in its twisting folds. It lifted from their backs in shimmering waves that danced in the glow of the tunnel lights. And through the maze of fog and heat, Blaster appeared a gigantic, mud-splashed devil presiding at the labors of a man-made hell.

He seized the long steel arm of the erector and drew himself up to the center of the shield. He turned, and from the vantage of the entrance to the center pocket watched the men at work below him. A narrow gauge set of tracks started at the muck pile and extended off through the misty darkness to the distant bulkhead. A small electric locomotive shunted laden cars before it and returned to the accompaniment of screaming brakes to deliver a string of empties. The muckers dipped and swooped methodically, never lifting their heads from the pile of sand before them.

On the wooden platform that spanned the center line of the tunnel, Dusty and his gang of blacks crept slowly toward the arch of the tunnel. There were nine curved segments forming each link of the tube and in each plate were eleven heavy bolts to be tightened. Seventy-five pound wrenches flashed in whirling arcs as the blacks drove home the retaining nuts. The Negroes chanted as they worked, breath breaking from their throats in bursts of song. It was wild, barbaric, savage in its primitiveness. Muscles and sinews doing the work no machinery had ever been able to replace. Man power was building a tunnel.

In the face before the circular shield stood the miners. Mutt set the pace, skillfully breasting down the wall of sand before him and bracing it with heavy planks and timbers. He worked silently save for an occasional grunted order to one of the men on either side of him. And he did not lift his head when Blaster announced his presence with the customary lump of mud thrown at Mutt's ear.

"Get t'hell out of here," he growled. "This face is as shaky as a fan dancer's hips. I thought the Rio Blanco was bad but the old East River's got 'em all licked."

"Don't you ever get tired of weepin'?" asked Blaster. "If it's too tough for you why don't you quit? Tommy could take your place and do twice as good."

"Yeah?" said Mutt. "Well listen here, wise guy—Tommy and me are goin' to a movie tonight. I got special permission from the nurse. And we don't want no company. That means you."

"Like hell you say!" roared Blaster. "I loaned Tommy to Wilson for a week. You know damn well the trial's starting in a couple of days. Albert's got a place out on Long Island and he's goin' to keep the kid there."

"Maybe that's a good idea," agreed Mutt. He was swinging a ten pound sledge as he spoke, driving a wedge beneath a timber. "Every time I think about them newspapers," he growled, "I feel like killing me a couple of reporters. If I could just get one of them down here for a few minutes, I'd—"

THE hammer rose in a rapid stroke. It screamed through the air and buried two inches of iron in a timber brace. The wood splintered.

"Quit it, Mutt!" barked Blaster. "You'll be driving yourself nuts. Gimme that hammer and go take a walk up tunnel. Grab a drink of water and cool off."

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"Don't be a fool," said Mutt, and wrenched at the sledge hammer. It held fast and blistering curses foamed from Mutt's lips as he heaved at it.

Blaster stepped aside and watched the miner closely. He had never seen this man before. Usually Mutt was silent. His emotions were never betrayed by so much as a lifted eyebrow. He was known as the finest poker player on the job. And Blaster had seen him fill a straight flush without a trace of emotion when his whole month's pay lay before him on the table.

When Mutt fought it was silently. When he worked, it was a methodical process of half spoken orders and quick gestures. Some claimed he reserved his conversation for Blaster alone. And his grumbling replies to the heading boss' questions had always been a source of amusement to Blaster.

But this was a different Mutt. Something within him had snapped and he was dangerous. A backward lunge split the sledge handle and Mutt threw the broken piece wildly against the face. He groped blindly for another, snatching one from the hands of the astonished Scotty. He lifted a wedge, set it in place and again the hammer whirled.

Blaster leaped forward with his arms outstretched. He wrapped them tightly about the raging miner and threw him to the sand covered platform. Mutt fought viciously as Blaster sought to pin him down. Scotty jumped in from the far pocket and thrust a bundle of hay against the face of the tunnel.

It was too late.

Sand poured through the plank that had splintered beneath the savage blows of Mutt's sledge. It poured in an ever increasing stream upon the struggling men beneath.

A weird moaning sounded in the pocket. And fog swirled in dancing wraiths against the face.

"It's goin'!" screamed Scotty. "The face is goin'!"

Blaster clambered to his feet. He grabbed a cement bag and stuffed it into the widening breach. The twisting air currents whipped it forward and upward into the river bed. Another and yet another followed it. Boards, hay, tools, everything within reach was stuffed into the all-consuming maw.

The air had found an outlet and was screaming through the breach in an effort to be free. The explosive pressure was widening the opening, carrying everything along in its wild journey. Timbers were splintered, planks swished through the vent, shredding themselves to splinters on their way. Maelstrom seethed in the cramped confines of the pocket. And the miners fought it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLOW.

MUTT was on his feet now. He was silent save for the low, terrible curses that slipped from between his clenched teeth. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Blaster and fought the inrush. Behind them, Scotty scrambled about the pocket, grabbing anything that came within reach and passing it to the battling giants. The third miner had ducked through the opening of the shield and was screaming for more ammunition with which to fight the blow.

Bags of gravel and cement sailed upward through the fog. The muckers were scouring the tunnel for material and passing it up to the men on the firing step. The monstrous blacks ripped the wooden platform to pieces and hurled the pieces into the pocket. And forward, beneath the curving hood of the shield, two men fed the whirlpool.

"Get out, Scotty!" ordered Blaster. "We can't stop it!"

Scotty cast one hasty glance at the twisting mass of wreckage and turned. He leaped from the shield and landed in the muddy water of the East River. It was swirling into the tunnel through the lower pockets. And the men of the gang were knee deep in it.

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When the miner left the shield it was a signal the gang had awaited. It meant defeat. Once again the river had won in its continual fight with them. They ran.

But up in the face Blaster battled on. The heading boss was as the captain of a ship. There could be no defeat with honor if a single life were lost. He stood at the breach, fighting, cursing, raging at the river.

"Get goin', Mutt!" he howled.

"Like hell!" screamed the miner. "It's my party—I started it—I'll finish it. Scram!"

"Get out of here, I said!" roared the heading boss.

"Fer God's sake, run!" gasped Mutt. "I'll hold it a while till you reach the locks, anyway."

He was struggling with a timber as he spoke and Blaster wrenched it from his hands, stuffing it crosswise into the breach. There was a sound of tearing wood and the timber vanished. A gale howled about their heads and a blinding sand storm beat against their naked backs, searing their flesh like flame.

"I'm tellin' you—run!" gasped Blaster. "Think about the kid, Mutt—and Lottie—you gotta job to do!"

"I'm thinkin' about them," yelled Mutt, and jammed the last bag of cement into the hole. "She loves you, Blaster—get out of here—she loves you!"

But the words were whipped from his lips by the gale and the huge figure of Blaster loomed suddenly before him. Two powerful hands gripped his shoulders and forced him toward the entrance of the pocket. He saw a pair of staring eyes blazing into his own and knew Blaster would hurl him from the pocket—and into safety.

He wrenched free. A maniacal strength surged through his body. He screamed, pleading with the heading boss—begging him to go—cursing him—howling the names of Lottie and the boy into the hurricane. But Blaster drove steadily forward. He meant to send Mutt out into the upper world. He had weighed the merits of himself and Mutt and found himself wanting. Save for this one lapse, Mutt was steady as the earth. Tommy would be safe with Mutt. And in addition to that, Blaster was the *heading boss*. It was his job to stay. He moved forward.

The heel of Mutt's boot thudded against his groin. The lanky miner leaped toward him, twisting, circling to drive him from the pocket. Blaster stepped back. And was wrenched into darkness.

A WHIRLPOOL seized him with a thousand thrashing arms. The compressed air, exploding upward in a blasting fury, had caught him. His ears were filled with a monstrous rushing sound. His sinews were pulled, torn, distorted by an irresistible force. He seemed to be traveling through an eternity of roaring hell. There was no order. There was no sense of direction. A blinding chaos filled his world. It was a mad world—a world of sound and pain.

He felt a wetness about him. And he was climbing—up and up—and up. A blazing light smashed across his eyes. And he hung suspended in mid-air—stationary—a static thing in a monstrous, sun-lit void. He thought it was death. He knew it was death. He was glad it was over. Dying had been pain, but this was peace.

And then from that measureless section of time, caught in the fragment of a second, Blaster felt himself falling. Down—down—down into a bottomless abyss. And there was water all about him. He was sinking, struggling, fighting for breath, fighting his way upward—resentful that he should have to fight but driven on by a savage will. His lungs were on fire, his head was throbbing with the beat of a tom-tom. He opened his mouth and a cry burst from his throat. Blackness smothered him.

"LOOK!" cried a deck hand on a nearby tug. "There's a man!"

A foaming column of water lashing skyward under the urge of countless tons of escaping air had attracted the attention of the river craft. Tugs were circling the spouting geyser at a respectful distance. The crews were watching in fascinated at-

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tention as the tunnel spewed forth the offerings fed to it by the sand hogs. Timbers and bags had soared into the air amidst the smother of white water. And now from the twisting column came the figure of a man. His arms lifted in a feeble attempt at swimming, they thrashed wildly and his head sank below the surface.

A white circle of cork spun through the air. A deck hand dived into the green waters of the river and rose with his arms about Blaster. They hauled the unconscious man aboard the nearest tug and headed for shore.

Word of the blow spread rapidly along the waterfront and found its way unerringly to the city rooms of the daily newspapers. A battalion of reporters stormed into the hospital within an hour of Blaster's arival. Here was news. A man had been blown through the river bed, catapulted fifty feet into the air and lived. Records of two other sand hogs who had met with similar experiences were resurrected from the files. It was found that all three men had been gambling with death beneath the East River. These things had happened right in New York's back yard. No other place on earth could show a record of a similar experience. And the presses turned to create a new hero.

Editors demanded that their men secure interviews. They wanted pictures—pictures of the tunnel—pictures of the river—but chiefly they wanted pictures of Blaster. What was his first name? His last name? Did he have a name? Where did he live? And countless other questions.

The hospital authorities were powerless to stop the onrush of the news gatherers. The reporters worked their way past the usual barriers erected to stop overanxious visitors. They swarmed into the corridor outside of Blaster's ward. And in desperation the authorities transferred the unconscious sand hog from the ward maintained by Martin & Ranger to a private room.

At the bedside, his face showing the marks of his recent battle below the river, sat Mutt. He was silent and his eyes never left the face of his friend. His blunted fingers twisted and turned, balling into fists, opening, closing again until the bones seemed about to break through the flesh. His teeth were clenched and his respirations followed those of Blaster as though he would breathe for the man beside him. He was ignored by the nurses and so silently did he sit that within a short time they forgot he was in the room.

THE scuffling of the reporters in the hall and their insistent questions to the nurses who entered and left the room brought a grimace of anger to Mutt's face. At times he seemed about to plunge through the door and deal with them in his own way. But a groan from the bed held him anchored to the chair.

Blaster lifted to his elbows. His eyes opened and he stared blankly at the wall. His chest heaved and the cords of his neck tightened.

"Get out, Mutt!" he screamed. "She needs you—I'll hold it till you've gone! Lottie needs you! Tommy needs you!"

The screams carried the piercing edge of delirium. They were ghostly, inhuman things that rang along the tiled corridors of the hospital. The nurses stepped hurriedly to Blaster's side, forcing him back upon the pillows. But the giant sand hog was once again fighting to stem an inrushing river. He struggled and forced them from him.

He cursed Mutt—he cursed the river—he screamed of his love for Lottie—he called to Tommy and asked him to forgive him for dying—he was back in San Miguel fighting with Lopez—he was pleading with Lottie to defend her life—pleading in Tommy's name — telling of the son who loved her and waited to see her. His screams became louder, more piercing, and his struggles more violent.

Mutt sprang to the bedside. He gripped the giant by the shoulders, forcing him back. He stared at him, striving to break through the wall of delirium as a doctor hurried into administer a hypodermic.

Suddenly the glare melted from Blaster's eyes. He relaxed, sighed and turned upon

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his face. Mutt stepped back from the bed and was waved from the room by the doctor. He opened the door and strode into the midst of the reporters.

There was a momentary hush as though even these hardened newshawks were stunned by the immensity of their fortune. In front of the group was the ferret-like individual named Reilly who had been manhandled by Blaster at the Tombs. He had caught a brief glimpse of the heading boss through the opened door. But that was enough. Instant recognition dawned upon him. And the agile mind of the reporter whirled to the possibilities of the story. He grabbed Mutt by the arm.

"What was he saying about that Carington dame?" he said. "What's it all about?"

Mutt's fingers closed about Reilly's throat. They squeezed. And he shook the the man as a terrier would shake a rat. It took the efforts of the entire crew to tear him away and even then Reilly's face had blackened. An officer, hastily summoned by an attendant, broke up the mêlée but not until the lanky sand hog had battered the features of a half dozen newspapermen. He led Mutt to the elevator and attempted to get him out of the building.

"Nix, officer!" pleaded Reilly when he was once again able to talk. "Lay off him! That guy's worth a million bucks to any paper in town. Let us talk to him."

The officer was hesitant. The power of the press was no mythical thing in police circles. A favor to the reporters might be the means of promotion. He wavered and Reilly quickly followed his advantage.

"None of us will press a charge against him," he argued. "Let him go—we'll take care of him."

MUTT was silent. He stood immobile throughout the discussion. His eyes were narrowed to slits and his jaws were tight. It was as though he were in a different world. And for a time even the insistent questioning of the reporters failed to arouse him.

"You like this dame, don't you?" he heard Reilly yelling into his ear. "Be regular with us and we'll give her a break. Loosen up, feller! We know she's got a kid and we'll find him if we have to tear the town apart. This is news, guy—*news*—d'you understand? The big feller's in love with her, ain't he? And he's takin' care of the kid? The kid's name is Thomas—like his father, eh?"

The questions seared. Each one hit a salient point. There was no evading the logic of the reporters. And Mutt surrendered. If Blaster had violated a promise to Lottie in his delirium, there was nothing for Mutt to do but play it through.

He told them the story but threatened them with instant death if they spoke to young Tommy. And when it was over and the newspaper men had dashed off to the telephones, Mutt walked like a whipped dog back to Blaster's room.

He sat by the bedside, nor would he leave throughout the entire night. And in the morning when Blaster awakened, the lanky miner was still beside him, staring off into space.

"What t'hell's all this?" asked Blaster in amazement. He looked about the room, wiggled his toes beneath the covers, yawned, stretched his arms in a prodigious arc and grunted, "Huh—is it a wake?"

"No such luck," said Mutt.

Recollection dawned upon Blaster. Again he stared about the room. He scratched bemusedly at the base of his skull.

"How'd I get here?" he asked.

"Up through the river."

"Well I'll be damned!"

"I hope so," agreed Mutt.

"How about you?"

"The blow stopped after you went through," said Mutt. "The gang came in again and everything was fine."

"That's swell," said the heading boss. "Swell!"

"Yeah? Wait'll you hear what I got to tell you. You'll wish we were both stuck in the river bed."

He sketched the story briefly to Blaster, glossing over the things his friend had said and shouldering the blame as much as

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possible. Blaster was erect at the conclusion of the tale and, sweeping the covers from him, he leaped to his feet.

"We gotta see Lottie," he cried. "We gotta do something. Where's my clothes? Hey, doctor!—nurse!—somebody get my clothes!"

CHAPTER XIV.

COURTROOM SCENE.

A NURSE hurried into the room and reached for a hypodermic. But Blaster managed to convince her of his saneness. She phoned for a doctor but before that gentleman could arrive, Blaster and Mutt had dashed from the room. Clad in a short hospital nightgown that revealed far more than it concealed, Blaster hobbled barefooted along the corridors and down the stairs. Mutt followed him and together they ran the gantlet of protesting screams that greeted them at every turn. Out onto the street and into a taxi they ran. And at the hotel, Blaster crouched in the bottom of the cab until Mutt had dashed up to their suite and procured a few articles of clothing. The heading boss dressed as quickly as possible in his cramped quarters and followed Mutt into the hotel.

They phoned the lawyer and put him in touch with the recent developments and cursed him for his congratulations. They called the job and asked for Wilson.

"Gorblimey!" he barked. "Thought I'd gotten rid of one of you beggars. Even the stinkin' river won't 'ave you, eh?"

"Where's Tommy?" asked Blaster.

"At me 'ome!" roared Wilson. "And so is the blinkin' nurse. If you blokes 'ave seen the blahsted newspapers you'll know I jolly well intend to keep the boy there. You confounded idiots!"

"That's great," said Blaster. "We're going over to see Lottie."

"You are not!" yelled the superintendent. "Keep t'hell away from that poor girl, my sons! What she doesn't know won't worry her. Time enough to 'ear it when she 'as to. 'Er trial's on tap tomorrow—you'll see 'er then."

The click of a receiver ended the conversation and Blaster turned to his partner.

"Hear that?"

"Think I'm deaf?" asked Mutt. "When Albert barks you don't need a telephone. And I think he's right, too."

"He didn't say anything about coming into work," said Blaster. "Think he expects us?"

"No. I don't. And I'm not going back until after—"

"Me, too," agreed Blaster. "Wish I had a drink."

"Ah, don't break all your promises," said Mutt. "Let's take a walk."

They walked the streets of the Brooklyn waterfront all that day. And when night came they wandered out onto a dock not far from the job. Manhattan was across the river, pushing myriad black shapes up into a black sky. There was an unreality about it that provided a fascination for Blaster. On other nights he had watched the lights wink out, one by one, in the lofty towers. He had likened the city to a cardboard village erected by a child. And now, with the petulance of that child, he longed to stretch a mighty paw across the ribbon of silver and smash the toy that had hurt him.

Somewhere, in one of those dark smudges beyond the bridge, a woman was pacing distractedly. And two men squatted on the end of a dock and saw her face in the fast moving waters of the river. They spoke but seldom and usually in undertones. They were waiting—waiting for day to lift over their shoulders and bring to life a sleeping city.

AND when it came, chasing the river mists before it with shafts of sunlight, they arose as by common consent and left the waterfront. They made an incongruous pair as they stood before the doors of the courtroom waiting for them to be opened. Mutt's lank form was accentuated by the wrinkled condition of his clothes. He had not had them off in two

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nights and they hung in folds about him. His hair was matted and tangled. His eyes had burned deep into his head. He was dirty, unshaven and hard.

The ponderous bulk of Blaster barred the entrance to the court as though he would shut out the world from Lottie's suffering. A two-day growth of beard gave to his face a forbidding look. He was sullen, dangerous in his silence. And his clublike fists beat constantly against his thighs.

When court opened they walked quietly to seats near the rail. An attendant watched them suspiciously for a moment until a few whispered words from a newspaper man brought a smile of understanding to his face. He nodded, and in turn whispered to another attendant. The story spread as the courtroom filled and the pair became a pivot about which spun the mutterings of the spectators. All eyes were fastened upon them. But Blaster and Mutt were quite unaware.

They were watching the door through which Lottie was to enter. A sympathetic officer had noticed their eyes darting from one place to another, and guessing at the cause, had silently pointed to the door. Blaster thanked him with a nod. And now he and Mutt sat silently—waiting.

There was a murmur as Lottie entered the room. She was dressed plainly, even severely. Her hair was drawn back from her forehead and braided. And the braids were twisted into soft golden swirls behind each ear. She was pale, pitifully pale—and against the whiteness of her face, her eyes were a contrasting blue—sky-dyed and beautiful.

Blaster and Mutt followed her every movement as she crossed to the counsel table. The intensity of their gaze acted as a magnet and drew Lottie's eyes to theirs. She smiled. And the two sand hogs answered with a sorry attempt at cheerfulness.

The routine of justice dragged through its weary formula and the day ended with the selection of the jury. It had not been easy to select an impartial set of jurors. Lottie's attorney, Frank Morgan, seemed quite content to ask a few routine questions and nod an acceptance. But the prosecuting attorney was in a very different state of mind. He made constant reference to the newspapers, demanding of the prospective jurors if they had been swayed to any last minute burst of sympathy toward the prisoner.

At times a puzzled expression crossed Lottie's face as she listened to these questions. She glanced at her attorney, who smiled in reply and hurriedly looked away. She turned to Blaster and Mutt and her eyes asked a thousand questions. Blaster squirmed and chewed at his lower lip. Mutt hid his motions behind a poker face and scratched at the stubble upon his chin.

THE following day the battle for Lottie's life commenced in earnest. The State wove a skillful net of circumstantial evidence about its prisoner. Guests who had been present the night of Carington death were reluctantly forced to repeat each detail of the evening. They told, under questioning, of the splendid home that had been provided for her—of her jewelry and beautiful clothes. They spoke of Carington's charm and affability. The years had softened their memory of the man and they ascribed to him nonexistent virtues and managed to forget his vices. And under the skillful prompting of the prosecuting attorney, they succeeded in portraying Carington as the model husband—and Lottie as a wanton.

They recalled her rage at having been forced to admit that she could neither read nor write. Of course Carington had not known of it. He was as surprised as they, aud hurt by her humiliation. He had followed her into the bedroom to comfort her. He loved her, respected her. And had been killed for his love.

Morgan was equally skillful in his cross-examinations. His touch was light—feathery. By innuendo and jest he ripped their stories to pieces and refreshed their memories with old newspaper accounts of Carington's escapades. He seemed content with gaining a slight confession of inaccu-

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racy from each witness before turning to the next.

The crowd in the courtroom was but slightly interested in these preliminaries. They waited patiently for the time when Morgan would summon Lottie to the witness chair. She had not uttered a single word in self defense to the newspapers nor had her attorney. But within the past two days these same papers that had convicted her, had re-tried her case. And now she no longer the Tiger Girl.

True, she was a tigress. But now she was a jungle creature fighting to protect her young. Headlines linked her name with that of Blaster. His picture faced hers and between them was the smiling face of Tommy. The photographers had tracked him down and much to the youngster's surprise he had been flanked by a score of cameras.

They quoted Blaster's ravings in the hospital. They quoted Mutt's story. Cables had brought confirming praise of Lottie from South America. Government officials offered to come to New York as character witnesses. The town of San Miguel was loud in its praise of the owner of the Elite House. And seated in the courtroom, the man who had been responsible for the greatest front page story in years was cursing himself for a broken promise.

There was a hush when Morgan helped Lottie up onto the stand. Her lips parted ever so slightly when the oath was administered.

"I do," she answered and seated herself.

MORGAN led her quickly through the routine questions and the spectators leaned expectantly forward at their conclusion. Morgan stepped to the counsel table and lifted a picture which he handed to the clerk of the court and requested it be marked as an exhibit. When it was passed back to him, he held it behind his back and approached the stand.

"Charlotte Carington—are you the mother of Thomas Carington?" he asked.

Lottie stiffened. The cords of her throat drew taut. Her hands clenched about the arms of the chair. And her breath came in long, deep gasps. Her eyes left those of her attorney and sought for Blaster. They found him. And a look of such utter reproach came from them that Blaster started to his feet.

She too rose, slowly, deliberately. And color flooded into her cheeks.

"Why?" she cried. "Blaster—*why* did you do it?"

"Ah, Lottie—I—I—" Blaster's protest was lost in an excited roar from the spectators.

The judge pounded with his gavel; attendants hurried toward Blaster; the prosecuting attorney was on his feet howling objections; Mutt slumped down into his seat and through it all Morgan smiled in utter satisfaction. He had kept the reporters away from Lottie, he had prevented her from knowing anything of Blaster's accident and subsequent exposure. He had set the stage for a drama of primitive emotions. And he had succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

That one question from Lottie had done more to the case of the prosecution than any argument he might offer. There was no doubt as to its genuineness. And although the court would rule it from the minutes and instruct the jury to disregard it, Morgan knew the scene just enacted could never be blotted from their minds.

When order was restored Morgan held the picture of Tommy before Lottie. He asked for and received an identification. He fixed the time of Tommy's birth and drew from her the story of her dreams for the boy's future. And when he had finished, all the efforts of the prosecution seemed futile.

Morgan's summation was a masterpiece. And the verdict was known by every person in court before the jury retired. It seemed they had scarcely closed the door behind them before they were once again in their places in the jury box. And the foreman smiled happily toward Lottie as he intoned, "We find the defendant not guilty."

There were cheers and laughter in the

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court. Women cried and men cursed joyfully. Reporters scrambled for the exits and the judge's gavel beat a constant tattoo. The trial was over, the drama had been played through to the end and the hero-worshipping public was on its way to tell the news.

MORGAN offered his arm to Lottie and asked to escort her to a rear room until the usual formalities were disposed of. He led her around the table, guiding her that she might not stumble, for her eyes were fastened to the floor. He paused by the rail.

"Look up, my dear," he said.

Lottie lifted her head. Standing before her were Blaster and Mutt. Their faces were a study in contrasting emotions as joy and sorrow fought for predominance. She studied them both.

"Why didn't you let me die?" she asked quietly, then turned and walked from the room.

For a moment the two sand hogs stood as though stunned. Then slowly they left the court.

"She hates us," said Blaster when they gained the street.

"Do you blame her?" asked Mutt. "Poor Tommy—what's he goin' to think?"

"I don't know," said Blaster.

"Neither of you know!" barked a voice behind them. And they turned to find Wilson holding Tommy by the hand. "You blinkin' idiots 'aven't the brains of a flea—'ave they, Tommy?"

"They're pretty good uncles, I think," said the youngster, defending his champions. "Only, they should have told me Mom was comin' to meet me today."

"Course they should," said Wilson. "If it 'adn't been for Albert you wouldn't 'ave known what a wonderful mother you 'ave. Wouldn't 'ave known what a blinkin' pair of scoundrels you 'ad for uncles, either."

"You told Tommy all about it?" asked Blaster.

"Why not?" roared Wilson. "Anything to be ashamed of?"

"No—of course not," said the huge heading boss. "But Lottie is—"

"Lottie is 'eadin' this way right now," said Wilson, glancing up at the court steps. He turned to Tommy and grinned his twisted smile. "There she is, son— 'Op to it! 'Ustle along!"

Tommy was off in a mad dash. He covered the intervening space as fast as his feet could travel. His rush carried him deep into Lottie's arms and she held him tightly, fiercely, as though she would never release him.

Blaster and Mutt watched silently. They smiled as they turned to leave.

"Where t'hell you think you're goin'?" demanded Wilson.

"Back to the job," said Blaster.

"Time enough for that in the mornin'," barked Wilson. "You may be a super on the *next* job, but I'm still your boss, me sons. And you'll not run out and leave me alone. Come back 'ere!"

Then Tommy was at their side. He was tugging at their coat tails, hauling them around.

"Mom wants you," he said. "Better go quick, 'cause she's crying."

Blaster walked toward Lottie like a condemned man going to his doom. He glanced aside to seek the consoling comfort of Mutt's company. But he found himself alone. He looked back and found Mutt grinning at him from a safe distance.

"You're on your own this time—you big egg," called the miner.

Blaster felt Lottie's arms around him. His cheek was wet with her tears. And slowly his great arms crushed her to him.

"Aw, Lottie!" he said, and kissed her.

THE END

Coming—Other great construction yarns by *BORDEN CHASE*

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MEN of DARING
STOOKIE ALLEN
"LIKE DYNAMITE — SAFER WHEN LEFT ALONE"
BORN IN 1870 IN LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO, DR. CONNOR'S EARLY YEARS WERE SPENT WHERE SPANISH WAS MORE IN USE THAN ENGLISH. HIS EDUCATION WAS IN BOTH LANGUAGES- PLUS THAT OF THE SIX-GUN. HE BECAME PROFICIENT IN SHOOTING, BY CONSTANT PRACTICE ON THE HEADS OF RATTLERS.
DR. ROBERT Connor
CONNOR ATTENDED THE COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES AND BECAME A MINING ENGINEER. TIRING OF THE PROFESSION, HE TOOK UP DENTISTRY AND STARTED PRACTICE IN LAS CRUCES. FEES WERE FEW, AND HE ENTERED POLITICS AS A SIDELINE. HIS BRILLIANT SPANISH ORATORY GATHERED A FOLLOWING SO BIG THAT IT BECAME A MENACE TO GRAFTERS IN OFFICE.
HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS BECAME SO ALARMED THEY APPOINTED 3 OF THEIR GUN MEN TO KILL "EL DOCTOR," AS HE WAS AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN. THE 3 KILLERS TRIED TO BUSH-WHACK HIM. THEIR FIRST SHOT BROKE HIS LEFT ARM BUT IN SPITE OF THIS CONNOR MANAGED TO CALMLY KILL ALL THREE.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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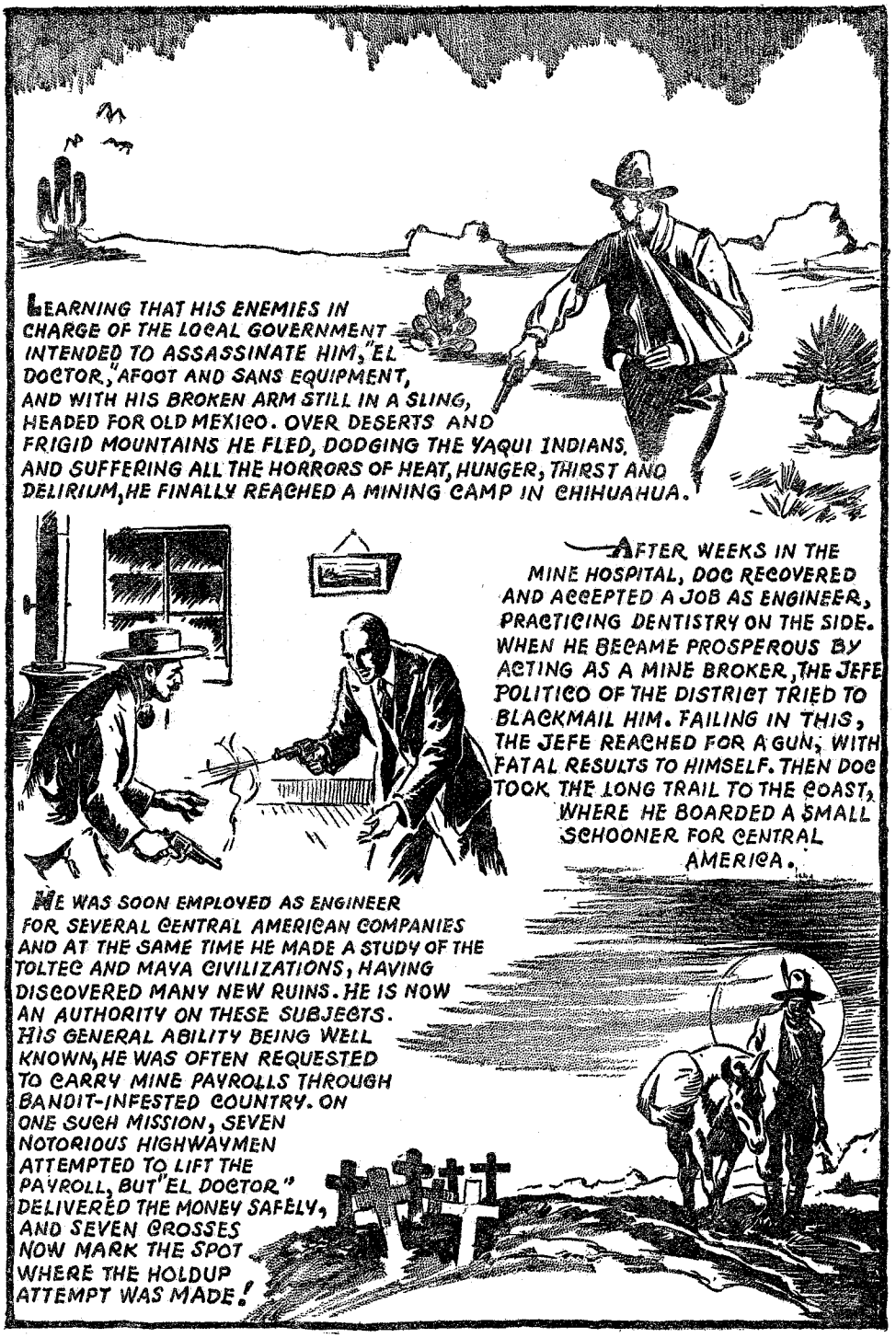
LEARNING THAT HIS ENEMIES IN CHARGE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO ASSASSINATE HIM, "EL DOCTOR," AFOOT AND SANS EQUIPMENT, AND WITH HIS BROKEN ARM STILL IN A SLING, HEADED FOR OLD MEXICO. OVER DESERTS AND FRIGID MOUNTAINS HE FLED, DODGING THE YAQUI INDIANS, AND SUFFERING ALL THE HORRORS OF HEAT, HUNGER, THIRST AND DELIRIUM, HE FINALLY REACHED A MINING CAMP IN CHIHUAHUA.
AFTER WEEKS IN THE MINE HOSPITAL, DOC RECOVERED AND ACCEPTED A JOB AS ENGINEER, PRACTICING DENTISTRY ON THE SIDE. WHEN HE BECAME PROSPEROUS BY ACTING AS A MINE BROKER, THE JEFE POLITICO OF THE DISTRICT TRIED TO BLACKMAIL HIM. FAILING IN THIS, THE JEFE REACHED FOR A GUN, WITH FATAL RESULTS TO HIMSELF. THEN DOC TOOK THE LONG TRAIL TO THE COAST, WHERE HE BOARDED A SMALL SCHOONER FOR CENTRAL AMERICA.
HE WAS SOON EMPLOYED AS ENGINEER FOR SEVERAL CENTRAL AMERICAN COMPANIES AND AT THE SAME TIME HE MADE A STUDY OF THE TOLTEC AND MAYA CIVILIZATIONS, HAVING DISCOVERED MANY NEW RUINS. HE IS NOW AN AUTHORITY ON THESE SUBJECTS. HIS GENERAL ABILITY BEING WELL KNOWN, HE WAS OFTEN REQUESTED TO CARRY MINE PAYROLLS THROUGH BANDIT-INFESTED COUNTRY. ON ONE SUCH MISSION, SEVEN NOTORIOUS HIGHWAYMEN ATTEMPTED TO LIFT THE PAYROLL, BUT "EL DOCTOR" DELIVERED THE MONEY SAFELY, AND SEVEN CROSSES NOW MARK THE SPOT WHERE THE HOLDUP ATTEMPT WAS MADE!

Next Week: Buckman Pasha, Sailor of Fortune

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Fox Elton knew it was a fight to the death

Novelette

Escape would be impossible with all Germany aroused and every secret agent on the alert—yet Berlin could not stop Fox Elton, master spy

The Courier from Spa

By ARED WHITE

Author of "Imperial Shadows," "The Emperor's Agent," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASQUERADER.

"A BOORISH lout, what, Carew?" the verbose English pilot addressed his subaltern after taking a snubbing from the American officer who rode in the same compartment with them. "I say, he has rather bad manners, eh?"

"Aye, Cap'n Bateson," said Lieutenant Carew, "and stuffy arrogance, sir!"

Captain Fox Elton, American military intelligence, ignored the affront, plainly meant for his ears. In fact, amusement

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sparkled in his level blue eyes, which were looking out of the dirty window of the stuffy French train in which the three rode from Paris to Noyon on the Allied battle front.

For two days he had been rehearsing for the transformation he must complete in a few hours when he would cease to be Captain Elton and become Oberleutnant Muhlenberg, Imperial German army. Within the week, if things went well, he must pass himself off on one Captain Ernst von Ridder, an Imperial secret courier.

And immediately thereafter test his skill at masquerade in the Imperial lair at Wilhelmstrasse.

In a German card case he carried with him were the engraved official cards of Oberleutnant Muhlenberg. In the large grip at his feet was a German hussar uniform with army staff scroll at collar and cap.

A leather dispatch case, concealed in his luggage, was stuffed with counterfeit German army orders designed to give him certain latitudes of movement in Germany.

The British officers waxed caustic. Captain Bateson, not yet fully sobered from the battle of Paris, found unusual offense in the attitude of aloofness of their traveling companion.

Ordinarily Elton would have been an acceptable traveling companion. But he knew that such a course would open up time-consuming conversation.

And right now he had to make use of every minute of these last few hours on Allied soil in rehearsing niceties of accent and fixing in mind certain military mannerisms.

In the morning he expected to be back of the German lines. And thereafter, for several days of desperate enterprise, his further earthly tenure would depend wholly upon his fidelity in living the rôle he must play.

Not only his own life, but many other lives; and perhaps it meant the shaping of important military history.

Late in the afternoon the train came to the French railhead at Noyon. As the three were leaving the coach the two British aviators again waxed disagreeable.

"I rather think, old dear, we should have the military police check that blighter's orders, what?" muttered Captain Bateson in a voice meant for Elton's ears.

"Right-o, Cap'n," echoed Carew. "Only a person of suspicion would 'ave such manners. I'll look up an I.P."

But as the trio emerged from the compartment a French colonel came up to Elton and greeted him with polite effusion. The colonel escorted the American to an automobile, an orderly following with the luggage. The car sped off at once to French headquarters a short distance back of La Fère.

"Everything, it is in readiness, *monsieur,*" the Frenchman announced. "We have prepared to yield the village of Autreches in the morning at daybreak. But yes, we have seen to it that the enemy knows we are weak at Autreches—and the Boches they will attack. Our resistance—it will be stiff, but not too stiff."

"Splendid, my colonel," Elton responded. "You are certain, however, that it is not known among too many of the staff just what is intended?"

"*Non, monsieur!* Only our division commander and myself know why we give this French village to Von Esch's front lines, and it is that even we know very little. My general asks that I inquire the further details of your mission. Not for the mere curiosity do we ask—but in the hope we can be of assistance."

Elton smiled and shook his head.

"My journey to Germany, *monsieur,*" he replied, "has nothing to do with operations in your immediate sector. I appreciate your interest and help most heartily none the less."

"I understand, captain—in fact I guess as much. Only on a mission of the gravest importance are we justified in sacrificing a point in our front line."

"A mission not only of great importance, I can assure you," Elton affirmed, "but also one of great delicacy and danger. In fact, while always an optimist, I've been

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unable to figure out the precise odds against me this time."

ON reaching French headquarters Elton was isolated at once in the French colonel's quarters. Supper was served to him by a French orderly. As darkness fell he put on the German staff uniform and touched up his appearance with meticulous care. A bit of waterproof pigment at his eyebrows and a few deft touches to stiffen the expression of his face was the extent of his disguise. A large monocle completed the picture of Prussian staff arrogance.

Elton made a final check of his assortment of German orders. French experts had furnished him these. First, German army orders directing Oberleutnant Muhlenberg to make certain visits in the front line areas southwest of Spa, then a memorandum order on the letterhead of Imperial field headquarters sending Muhlenberg to Berlin. Finally an assortment of ordinary travel orders for German trains, and various orders for the use of airplanes between such points as Spa and Koln, Koln and Berlin, and Berlin westward.

He had until nearly midnight alone, then the French colonel came with a long cape that was to conceal Elton's German uniform from the prying eyes of the French out in the front lines. The colonel acted as personal escort on the long, circuitous prowl into the fated village of Autreches.

Two armies lay warily on their arms under the soft starlight of a sultry summer night. Off in the distance counter-battery guns barked savagely.

The French colonel had done his work with great thoroughness. Elton, by two o'clock, was entrenched in the basement of a half-demolished stone hut in the shattered village of Autreches. The colonel gave his final instructions in a low voice.

"In little more than an hour, *monsieur*," he said, "the enemy will come—unless they suspect a trap. Not even our outpost commander knows you are here—therefore you must remain out of sight until the Germans have occupied the village. *Au revoir, monsieur*—and best of luck."

Elton sat down in a corner of the black hole to wait. He dared not smoke or move about lest he attract vigilant French patrols. For in his present masquerade he knew that a grenade would come hurtling into the hole if the French poilus discovered his presence.

He smiled ironically at this situation. Not until the Germans had captured the village would he be safe out in the open. And that safety would be a precarious safety which would depend wholly upon the quickness of his wits in meeting the desperate emergencies of the next few days.

Feet shuffled lightly on the dry ground overhead from time to time. Once or twice he caught muttered orders in French. Far in the distance there was a lively scrimmage in which was combined the pounding of light cannon and the vivid chatter of musketry. A raid, he guessed, on some sensitive point of the front lines. But in front of Autreches there was silence, an ominous silence that must have put French veterans on their toes as dawn approached.

With a swift violence that rocked the earth the enemy artillery opened up. Light and medium guns centered their wrath on the wreckage of Autreches. The darkness before dawn was broken by muzzle-flashes, the earth outside was torn by exploding shell pelted by shrapnel.

ELTON heard sharp French commands. From out of that bedlam, excited fragments told him the outposts were being pulled in, the main body of defenders withdrawn. Overhead he caught excited movement, a medley of voices. A French squad was taking shelter in the ruins of the old stone rookery over his head.

He fixed his eyes on the luminous dial of his watch. Daylight would break in a few minutes. The wrath of the artillery rose in a devastating crescendo. The basement shook as from an earthquake. A few minutes of this inferno and the artillery gave way to the rattle and chatter of musketry. Overhead a French machine gun opened up. Elton heard the sharp outcry of a wounded poilu. He knew that the German infantry platoons were closing in on Autreches.

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Through a yawning hole in the floor overhead he caught the dull gray of dawn. The machine gun directly over his head ceased its chatter. Whistles shrilled, he heard the pounding of frenzied feet; then a guttural command in German. The first Teuton wave had passed through the city.

Elton waited until the French squads had been beaten into the distance. Cautiously he worked his way out of the cellar. As he emerged erect from the hole a German squad came rushing up. He stepped boldly out in the open and lighted a cigarette.

CHAPTER II.

A COMMAND TO KILL.

THE soldiers, ignoring the figure in staff uniform, rushed into the wreck of the house, intent on their job of mopping up. Elton unslung his German field glasses and, keeping to the cover of the wrecked huts, swept the glasses back and forth across the front with a critical air.

He saw the attack had been made by a single battalion. But there had been a sharp fight. A score of poilus littered the landscape, stark in death—and as many Germans. The German litter-bearers were forward by now and were evacuating their wounded. Elton smiled grimly at this scene. Fifty men stricken—to cover the sensitive operation of his own infiltration into the German lines. But that was only war.

He shrugged and turned towards the rear. A young German infantry commander ran up to him, behind him a panting platoon of reserves. The young commander snapped to a halt in front of Elton, clapped his heels together and saluted.

"If the enemy has withdrawn, I'm directed to assisted in the pursuit, Herr Captain!" he announced. "What's the situation here, if you please?"

Elton surveyed the young officer with cold directness.

"I'm observing your tactics, Herr Lieutenant, not directing them!" he sneered, and strode off.

Behind Autreches, in the direction of the German main lines, lay a tangle of scrub oak and underbrush, through which had been cut trails for movement and observation. Elton turned his back on the captured French village. Having executed the precarious operating of penetrating the enemy front lines, he knew that it might be more discreet to remain in Autreches until evening, then work his way back.

But more important than that was the definite time schedule upon which he was compelled to operate. With infinite care he had worked out that schedule before leaving Paris. In another forty-eight hours he must be at the village of Genthin, some kilometers short of the city of Berlin. And upon his success in keeping that vital rendezvous depended wholly the success or failure of his mission.

He set out at a brisk pace along a trail through the thicket. Cold audacity he knew to be his best weapon in working his way back out of the zone of action into the interior. Whether he would get a train at the nearest German military railhead, or by just what route and means he would travel to the vital village of Genthin, was wholly a matter of circumstance. There had been no such thing as planning in advance that part of the venture.

A few squads passed him, infantrymen moving forward to the occupation of Autreches. A battalion staff officer came along and stiffened to attention at sight of the Imperial staff markings at the collar of Elton's Prussian tunic. Elton ignored the officer and marched on.

A slight smile played at the corners of his mouth. That stiff, Prussian *savoir faire* of his masquerade was a perfect passport. Then, another fifty meters farther on, his brows contracted slightly at sight of a stiff military manikin moving in the trail towards him. This officer's manner was a counterpart of his own cool staff arrogance. An officer of the grade of major, and on his collar the insignia of an army corps.

The major halted abruptly a few paces in front of Elton and eyed him sharply.

"Who comes here?" the major demanded.

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"From observation of this little operation on Autreches, Herr Major," Elton replied with stiff unconcern of the other's rank.

"Halt! Your pass!" barked the major as Elton started on his way.

"Why do you ask?" Elton demanded, facing about with a show of resentment. "My business here is finished and I'm in a hurry!"

"Your pass!" the major barked again, extending a peremptory hand for Elton's military passports.

Elton took from his leather dispatch case the forged military orders that identified him as Oberleutnant Muhlenberg, Imperial headquarters. The major took the paper, scanned it critically and fixed Elton with a pair of searching gray eyes.

"It's my opinion, *Herr Oberleutnant,* that these orders are a forgery!" he snapped. "I'll examine what other papers you have to offer and if they do not satisfy me, I shall take you in arrest for further examination!"

Elton bared his teeth in a contemptuous indifference. He reached for his dispatch case, as if to produce other papers. But he knew parley was useless. The contents of that case would betray him fully. That multiplicity of forged orders he carried, some of them dated several days ahead, could spell disaster no more promptly than if he handed the Herr major his personal card as an American secret service agent.

Quickly he estimated the situation. Before him was a determined officer, slightly larger than himself, armed, bristling with suspicion. And along this trail, at any moment, might appear a new infantry contingent headed into Autreches.

Elton attacked with precipitate fury, clutching the major by the throat with both hands and forcing him back into the cover of a willow thicket. Elton's alert eyes caught the play of his antagonist's hand to a holstered Lüger. The weapon was clear of its holster before Elton gained the major's wrist.

From the outset of his attack Elton knew that it was a fight to the death. There could be no half-measures. Either this major, whom misfortune had thrown in the course of his military mission, must die here and now, or his own life was the forfeit.

The Herr major bellowed an order with all the strength of his lungs.

"Waldsiemuller! Ottendorfer! Come quickly. I've a damned spy to arrest!"

ELTON guessed that the Prussian's henchmen must be close at hand. With a quick lunge he cast himself free of the grapple, ignoring the other's drawn weapon. There was but one chance, and that chance now lay in the swift accuracy of pistol marksmanship. Elton's hand flashed with the force of a piston to his own holster. His stiffened thumb forced the buttoned flap, his Lüger leaped into the air in the same movement.

The major's weapon cracked, his fire delivered a fraction of a second before Elton's pistol was in line with its target. But the German's aim was stricken by stress of excitement. The bullet went wild. Elton's quick aim had the element of calculating deliberation that a trained marksman, in contained possession of his faculties, measures into the veriest instant. As his Lüger barked, the Herr major's stony face broke into a grimace of stark agony, his hands clutched at his breast. He staggered, gasping, half turned and sank to the ground.

Elton bent over his fallen antagonist. He saw that the officer was unconscious, his body in the last throes of death. With a shrug he turned back to the trail, leaving the body lie where it fell. Musketry was still chattering beyond Autreches, therefore those two shots out of that tragedy behind the front lines would attract no attention.

IN this domain of violence and sudden death, Elton knew that the Herr major would be picked up and buried with small ceremony, another casualty of the scrimmage at Autreches. That the fatal bullet was fired by a German Lüger pistol from close range, rather than from a distant French rifle, was a fact certain to be overlooked. Except for a terse notation in

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the casualty lists, the hapless Herr major had ceased to exist as a menace to Elton's trek to Berlin.

Out in the trail Elton saw two soldiers hurrying up. He noted from their manner that they were looking for someone and guessed that these were the Herr major's henchmen. They halted in respectful attitude to permit Elton to pass.

"You're looking for the Herr major?" he demanded.

"Yes, *Herr Oberleutnant,*" said the smaller of the two men.

"What were your orders?"

"To fill the fuel tanks of the Herr major's motor car and report to him at the village of Autreches."

Elton stared glumly. One was a wagoner, driver of the car, the other a corporal, and doubtless a personal orderly. The wagoner was a powerfully built but unwieldy youth hardly out of his teens, with the heavy underslung jaws of a gorilla and the mild blue eyes of a cherub. The other man was probably thirty, of medium build and with the bluntly molded, somber expression of a soldier of much service.

"Your Herr major is dead," Elton told them. "He was killed by the enemy a few moments ago. His body is lying just off the trail a short distance from here."

A stunned expression swept the big fellow's face. He blinked rapidly and turned to the corporal, whose stolidity was unshaken by the news. Elton took them to the Herr major's body. The two stood a moment with bowed heads.

"You'll come with me," Elton directed. "Oberleutnant Muhlenberg, Imperial general staff. We must drive to the headquarters of your corps and see what are your orders."

The two stiffened at attention, their heavy heels clicked metallicly. Their hands rose to the rim of their inverted coalscuttle helmets.

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant,*" they said in unison.

Elton's eyes sparkled as he set off through the thicket. With two soldiers trailing him at respectful interval, his masquerade was complete. And out of the dangers of the past few minutes had come a new security, with possibly the acquisition of two invaluable allies if he played his cards right. Having killed the Herr major it might prove a simple matter to inherit the dead major's two henchmen. Likewise the official staff car bearing the insignia of an army corps at its windshield.

The staff sedan was parked at the end of an improvised artillery road two miles back of Autreches. Elton stepped inside with an air of authority. Before giving instructions he questioned the pair briefly. The wagoner was named Waldsiemuller, the other Ottendorfer. Both were attached to the army corps staff section that had sent the Herr major forward to observe at Autreches.

"You two impress me as excellent soldiers," Elton commented, looking from one to the other. "You will drive me at once to headquarters of the corps and I will see what orders I can arrange for you."

The audacity of invading a high field headquarters caused Elton but slight uneasiness: Experience had taught him that there are few points less dangerous for the skilful secret agent. But he knew the visit would have to be brief and that he must avoid official complications or questions. A drive of fifteen kilometers put him into a huddle of stone farm buildings that housed the German corps command. He left Waldsiemuller and Ottendorfer waiting in the car outside while he stalked into the headquarters.

HALF a dozen staff officers of various rank were poring over field desks. He passed on through the staff room to the clerical section and went to an orderly in charge.

"A sheet of official paper—and the use of a typewriter," he commanded. "I wish to write a report."

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant,*" the orderly assented. "But I have here a corporal who can take dictation and transcribe it with great speed for you."

"I didn't ask you for a stenographer!" Elton snapped.

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"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant*—your pardon please," the soldier apologized. "Your typewriter's ready and I'll bring stationery at once."

When, a few minutes later, Elton emerged from corps headquarters he was fortified by a neatly written order done on the letterhead of the corps commander. It directed that Corporal Ottendorfer and Wagoner Waldsiemuller, attached to the services of Oberleutnant Muhlenberg, accompany that officer to such points as might be necessary to carry out confidential instructions of the Emperor.

"You will drive to the north," Elton directed them. "When you come into the road that leads to Givet, you're to stop the car. Then I'll deliver to you in secret your new orders."

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant,*" said Ottendorfer, who climbed into the driver's seat beside Waldsiemuller and repeated the instructions.

A few kilometers brought the car to the designated spot. Elton got out and ordered the two at attention in front of him. He had estimated the temperament, training and intelligence of these two men and meant to tie them in securely to his adventure of the next few days. He handed the bogus corps order to Ottendorfer, who read it and passed it to Waldsiemuller.

"As I said before," Elton addressed them, "you impress me as very good soldiers. Am I mistaken?"

Waldsiemuller's blue eyes beamed, he flushed crimson in embarrassment at this unprecedented compliment from an officer of the Imperial staff. Even Ottendorfer's stolid martial expression softened.

"We try to be very good soldiers, *Herr Oberleutnant,*" said Ottendorfer.

"You know, of course, just why you're serving in this war?"

"Because," said Ottendorfer, "we have orders."

"IT is also, *Herr Oberleutnant,*" Waldsiemuller spoke up in his thin, piping voice that contrasted as strangely with his beefy hulk as did those boyish blue eyes with that gorilla jaw, "it is also because the enemy are all monsters."

"Very good," said Elton, and added with a cynical smile, "At least those are the conventional explanations on both sides of the fracas. But what I want to know, having before me a mission of some danger, is whether you two are willing to serve me loyally at all times?"

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant,*" both exclaimed, hands moving to the rims of their helmets in unison.

"And ask no questions?"

"If that's your wish," Ottendorfer responded promptly, the slower witted Waldsiemuller repeating the phrase after him.

"Very well then, men—here are your instructions. You'll drive at once, making all the speed possible, to the city of Koln. Follow the route Givet—Dinant—Namur—Liége—Aix-la-Chapelle—Koln. See to it your gas tanks are filled with fuel at every available motor transport station. Corporal, when we are halted at military barriers, I'll do all the talking. When we leave Koln, which we must do by tomorrow, I'll give further instructions. Do you understand clearly?"

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant.*"

Elton lolled back in the leather cushions of the staff sedan as the vehicle sped north on the open road. The hour was still short of ten o'clock. If all went well he would be in Koln before midnight, on the road to Berlin at daybreak.

Calmly he estimated his present situation, reënacted every event of the morning. So far as he could discern he had left no trail behind him. At least no trail that would breed instant suspicions. The body of the major would be interred as a matter of routine, along with the other dead at Autreches. The headquarters commandant at corps headquarters would miss Wagoner Waldsiemuller and Corporal Ottendorfer before midnight. But it was not within the realm of reason that he would guess the reason for that absence.

But Elton permitted himself no exultation over his momentary good fortune. He knew that he followed a littered and dan-

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gerous trail. After all, threading the zone of action was a simple feat compared with the danger of invading Berlin—going direct to the Imperial lair on Wilhelmstrasse.

Before that must come Genthin. Elton's face became gloomily taut as he thought of Genthin. That part of his mission he faced with small relish. For at Genthin he must meet the Herr Captain von Ridder, and his instructions were to kill Von Ridder at once; kill him quietly but ruthlessly, without warning or compunction.

CHAPTER III.

Nach Berlin.

BARRIER guards halted their progress from time to time while junior officers examined the forged Muhlenberg orders. These examinations were perfunctory. In an army whose command axiom was that the junior must fear his superiors more than he fears the enemy, the counterfeit Muhlenberg arrogance, fortified by the impressive staff car, did not invite unnecessary questions or light suspicions.

Elton kept an alert eye upon the roads and villages. He was stirred by a vague hope that he might find some hint in Belgium of the German military secret he sought. Perhaps the advance elements might have arrived from the Russian front, advance elements of that tidal wave of a million men.

A million men. Elton smiled whimsically at the thought of such a mission. Men enough to populate a mighty city, yet as mysteriously cloaked in their movements as the crew of a whaleboat lost in fog. Those million men, released by the Russian debacle and Teuton victories in the Balkans, would come roaring down on the Western front—and if they came on the wings of surprise it could only spell Allied disaster.

When and where were they being concentrated for shipment west? At what points would they be massed on the Western front for a titanic drive on Paris? When would they be ready to strike? Military secrets of incalculable value, relentlessly guarded by the Imperial high command, desperately sought by the Allied secret service. And Elton knew that a score of Allied agents had ended against Prussian walls in futile attempts to penetrate that secret Teuton veil.

Ottendorfer filled the gas tank at each military station along the way, leaving untouched the emergency supplies carried on running boards. Fuel was plentiful in the zone of action, but Elton knew that once they left Koln there would be no such thing as replenishing gasoline and oil short of Berlin.

They reached Liége late in the afternoon. The region of front line establishments was now behind them. There remained only the German garrisons that occupied Belgian centers of population. Mostly these were troops of older men detached from the fighting armies. Elton breathed easier in the thought that a corps staff car would receive the prompt right of way in such places.

At the barrier in front of Liége he handed the Muhlenberg orders impatiently to the middle-aged *oberleutnant* in command of the guard.

"Read quickly as I've got a long way to go before dark!" he commanded.

The *oberleutnant* scowled over the order. The fellow was a reservist type, evidently Bavarian, with low wide forehead, thick lips, bulbous, watery blue eyes and long thin face. He shook his head.

"My orders are to pass no one except those attached to our rear echelons," he muttered. "Therefore I must report your presence to my superiors for instructions."

Elton read the man's obstinacy and wasted no time in argument. He thrust open the door of his sedan.

"Very well, step inside then and we'll drive to headquarters where you'll be given better instructions!" he commanded, and then added sharply as the officer hesitated, "Don't you know it's treason to delay an Imperial courier traveling on the Emperor's business!"

The *oberleutnant* mouthed an order to an officer of lower rank placing the junior in

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temporary command of the barrier-guard at the entrance of Liége, then stepped into the staff car. At Elton's command the car leaped into full speed, sped on through Liége and into the route to Aix-la-Chapelle.

"Wait!" exploded the *oberleutnant*, staring wildly about as he saw Liége fade behind. "But this isn't the route to headquarters of my provost marshal!"

With a deft movement of his hand, Elton took over the *oberleutnant's* sidearms. Stripping the fellow's Lüger from its holster, he poised it across his knees suggestively.

"Didn't I tell you it's treason to delay the Emperor's business!" he snapped. "Do you think such business as I travel on can be delayed by a stupid reserve officer! I'd be justified in shooting you—under the circumstances. But instead I'll surrender you in arrest at Aix-la-Chapelle. How do you suppose one can travel to Strassbourg yet tonight if delayed by insubordinate fools!"

THE *oberleutnant* turned livid, then the blood drained from his face, leaving it the color of parchment. Elton followed the play of the fellow's sluggish, methodical mind. When he had gained his wits the *oberleutnant* started further remonstrance.

"Silence!" Elton barked. "You can be heard after I've delivered you at Aix-la-Chapelle."

Dusk was thickening when the car was halted at the entrance of Aix-la-Chapelle. Here the road led in many directions, eastward into Koln, to the south in the direction of Luxembourg. The barrier commander accepted the Muhlenberg orders promptly and with a deferential salute. Elton promptly put into execution his one risky alternative to killing the *oberleutnant* from Liége.

He stripped his prisoner of insignia of rank and, suddenly opening the door of the sedan, thrust the fellow out. The *oberleutnant* went rolling across the muddy cobblestones and lay half-stunned by the fall.

"There's a prisoner for you!" Elton roared at the officer in charge of the barrier. "A soldier who is out of his senses. We picked him up on the highway—a raving fellow who fancies himself commander of troops—a paranoiac with delusions of persecution and grandeur."

"*Jawohl,* I'll take him to the guard house!" assented the guard commander. He smiled knowingly. "There are many of these old fellows who have been touched by the war."

"But there may be something serious behind all this, *Herr Leutnant.* I want to investigate further. Therefore have your provost marshal hold him in close confinement, incommunicado, until I've had time to return from an official mission in Luxembourg!"

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant.*"

Above the roar of motors as the car got under way, Elton heard the hapless Bavarian raise a cry of protest. Glancing back he saw the fellow point an accusing finger after the speeding staff sedan. But the warning fell on deaf ears. The Bavarian was taken in charge by a squad, a soldier holding him by each arm, as they marched him away.

Elton settled back comfortably in the car, lighted a cigarette and smiled. Bavarian obstinacy had nearly ended his mission. But Prussian arrogance, skilfully displayed, had put him safely back on the road to Berlin. By the time the provost marshal at Aix-la-Chapelle learned that he had been duped, Elton expected to be out of Berlin and back in Paris. Or duly committed to a small plot in a German potter's field, all according to the turn of the cards in this precarious game.

Midnight saw them in Koln. Elton drove without hesitation to the elegant Kaisernhof, habitat of Prussian officers behind the lines. There he demanded a good room and quarters for his two men. Ottendorfer and Waldsiemuller were in high fettle over this unheard-of bit of luxury.

When Elton appeared in the rotunda a bare four hours later his two adopted henchmen, sleepy-eyed but happy, were ready for the next leg of this unexpected adventure under their mysterious new mas-

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ter who wore the livery of the Imperial high command. The first flush of the approaching sun was flared across the skies of the Rhinelands as the car roared out of Koln on the route to Coblenz. A few kilometers on, Elton ordered them to double back into the road whose signs read—*Nach Berlin.*

"Drive hard," he instructed. "We've got to be in Genthin by noon tomorrow—and we can't be so much as ten seconds late!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERR CAPTAIN VON RIDDER.

THROUGH the long day of travel there were no further barriers, only the civil police who stared respectfully, not forgetting the salute, as the Prussian staff sedan raced by.

Elton treated his two men with thoughtful consideration, seeing to it that they had a good luncheon with wine, and taking occasion to compliment them upon their endurance and promptness. The effect of this upon the pair was magical. Waldsiemuller's mild blue eyes were radiant, his gorilla jaws relaxed. Where the day before he had been a manikin, responding only to the accustomed sharp lash of command, his military service now plainly stirred both interest and enthusiasm, the grim uncertainties of his existence suddenly converted into a joyous adventure.

Even the veteran Ottendorfer, trained to a stolid discipline, lost his stony stare and grew more at ease with himself and the world about him.

Elton observed this transformation with satisfaction. He knew the response of such soldiers to proper treatment, knew he had won from them a loyalty that would stand even in the face of death.

He knew, too, that by deft coaching, he could prepare their minds for anything that was to happen, inflame their suspicions of possible spies to the point where they would shoot at his command. But he rejected any such misuse of his unwitting hostages, arguing that it was up to him to match wits with the Imperial high command without involving two simple soldiers too deeply in possible charges of treason.

They spent the night in the village of Rascha, leaving at daylight after a full night's rest. Eleven o'clock put them within a few kilometers of Genthin. Elton stopped at a wayside inn, gave his men funds for luncheon and beer, and as they returned issued careful instructions.

"You men have been taught how important it is to obey orders to the last letter," he addressed them.

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant,*" both responded in one voice.

"The nature of my duties are such that I must depend on you to be prompt, even within the exact minute, during the next few days. You are to answer any and all questions asked you simply by saying you act under official orders. And you, Ottendorfer, will keep your corps orders with you at all times—for your own protection. Do you understand?"

"Yes, *Herr Oberleutnant,* I understand."

"If by any chance you should later be questioned while in Berlin, you will tell everything that has happened to you, exactly as it happened, provided that course becomes necessary for you. Another point, remember that your first and last loyalty is to your Kaiser—and the Fatherland."

The older soldier, sharply puzzled by Elton's strange words, saluted his acceptance. Waldsiemuller bubbled over in good-humored loyalty to his new master.

"Whatever you order, *Herr Oberleutnant,* we'll obey to the letter!" he said.

"When we come into Genthin," said Elton, "I'll leave the car. You drive on to Brandenburg as quick as possible and wait at the railway station. I'll be along as soon as the Koln-Berlin express arrives from Genthin. You answer no questions at Brandenburg, but show your orders to the police if requested. That's all—let's get moving!"

Elton stepped out of the staff sedan in the center of the village of Genthin and walked direct to the railway station. The Koln express was running a few minutes

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late. A thing which was unheard of before war demoralized the time tables.

Although he was fully at ease outwardly, Elton paced down a vague restlessness deep within as he waited. He knew that in a few minutes he must face the first crisis in his reckless gamble—unless there had been some luckless shift in the plan that had brought him to Germany.

Would the Herr Captain von Ridder be aboard the train as scheduled?

FROM the French agent, of Alsatian antecedents, had come the tip of this Von Ridder junket. Entrenched at Imperial headquarters at Spa, Belgium, the agent had gotten the message through by a devious route. It had been flashed from Copenhagen to London, thence relayed to Paris in ciphered code.

VON RIDDER GOES VIA KOLN MIDNIGHT EXPRESS 24 JUNE WITH PLANS MILLION EAST TO WEST.

That message was written indelibly in Elton's memory. The French had appealed to American secret service headquarters for their best man to invade Germany and intercept Von Ridder. Only such a man as Elton, they argued, whose face and methods were little known outside France and Switzerland, could expect even a gambler's chance of success.

Stripped of its cryptic briefness, the message from Spa meant that the Imperial command staffs on the Western front had worked out their plans for taking over a million fighting men from the less sorely pressed zones of the Eastern front. And Von Ridder was carrying to Berlin the Herr Fieldmarshal's plan of placing those million men, a plan requiring only the final approval of Wilhelmstrasse. It was a matter of French deduction that Von Ridder thereupon would receive the detailed tables coordinating the gigantic movement westward by rail of that ominous human avalanche.

The shrill of a siren in the distance brought Elton to an abrupt halt. He caught the pennant of smoke streaming from the express locomotive and with a grim sort of fascination watched the train speed into Genthin. Its stop there was only for a few minutes to get clearance into Brandenburg and Berlin.

Elton strode down the train searching the compartments. Von Ridder, he guessed, would occupy a first-class compartment to himself. Several officers caught his eye but they lacked the staff insignia he searched for. By that insignia must he identify Von Ridder. He started imperceptibly at sight of staff scrolls on a Prussian high collar. Without hesitation he stepped into the compartment.

"You are the Herr Captain von Ridder, en route from Spa to Berlin?" he inquired brusquely.

The other searched his face circumspectly for a moment.

"Why do you ask?" he inquired.

"Because I have orders to locate Captain von Ridder at this point and ride with him to Brandenburg on a matter of mutual importance," Elton rejoined.

"I'm Captain von Ridder," the other said with placid politeness. "Please sit down—and introduce yourself."

Elton bowed and sat down. He tendered Von Ridder his cigarette case but said nothing, his manner indicating that he would speak when the train was discreetly in motion. Von Ridder accepted the cigarette and lighted it.

ELTON was conscious of a sudden squeamishness. Von Ridder was a slender little man whose only martial touch was a bristling waxed mustache. His eyes were large and thoughtful, his nose long, thin-bridged and aquiline, and under the mustache was a mild, friendly mouth.

A gentleman, plainly, but not of the military caste. Doubtless a reservist with a fine capacity for certain staff details, probably the type of man who would be at home in a drawing-room, whom the sight of blood and violence would sicken. Such men were valuable only at some great headquarters far behind the fighting front.

Von Ridder's holstered pistol, lying on

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the seat nearby, seemed strangely out of place as a part of the German's equipment. And Elton guessed that the officer had laid it aside gratefully for the duration of his ride into Berlin. To Von Ridder the weapon could be nothing more than a piece of prescribed equipment, a thing he was compelled to wear at times, but had no thought of using.

Elton remembered his orders and squirmed uncomfortably. Killing a man in battle, or in the violence of secret conflict behind the lines, was one thing. Killing him in cold-blooded deliberation was another.

He had meant, even before he saw his antagonist, to give Von Ridder a chance. In his code anything else would be sheer murder, war or no war. Regardless of the stakes involved, stakes involving the interests of nations and therefore of countless millions of people, Von Ridder was to have his chance. Elton had meant to unmask himself to Von Ridder at the proper moment. After that it would be a matter of whose pistol leaped first from its holster. And if Elton's swift aim, cool nerves and certainty of himself gave him the advantage, at least it was an honorable advantage, measured in terms of war.

The train glided out of Genthin. Elton took from his dispatch case the particular forged order meant for Von Ridder's eyes. Von Ridder glanced at it but paused without reading the order through to look up with a cordial smile.

"You are Oberleutnant Muhlenberg," he said in a low, musical voice. "You didn't introduce yourself, so I must learn from your orders. I'm glad to see you."

"I'm sorry, captain," said Elton. "But my business with you being purely official—I thought—"

"Ah, don't mind the slight difference in our rank, Muhlenberg," Von Ridder said pleasantly. "I never cared much about such things." He read through the forged order which said merely that Lieutenant Muhlenberg would explain verbally his mission. "Very well, *Herr Oberleutnant,* what brings you to meet me?"

"You're carrying to Berlin an important secret document, Herr captain. In fact the document—distributing one million men—is so important it's not even discreet that it be known such a thing exists."

Von Ridder started, stared thoughtfully at Elton a moment and smiled. But he made no comment. Elton angled adroitly.

"It's necessary for me to ask, Herr captain, if you are prepared to spend several days, or maybe as long as a week in Berlin?"

"What a shame!" Von Ridder exclaimed with an astonished lift of his brows. "I was instructed that I'd merely exchange one document for another and return tonight to headquarters. Ja, the papers I carry are mere confirmation—therefore I'm little more than a messenger. But why do you say I may be delayed?"

"Maybe you'll not be," Elton said quickly, looking out the window. "But in any event, we are to leave the train at Brandenburg and drive into Berlin by staff sedan. The car, with my two soldiers, is waiting for us in the Brandenburg station."

"But — isn't that unusual, *Herr Oberleutnant?*"

"Nothing is unusual in time of war, Herr captain. In any event those are your orders."

VON RIDDER nodded and lapsed into silence. Elton watched his man closely but saw neither remonstrance nor suspicion. He lighted another cigarette and lolled back in the compartment. Von Ridder, he knew, was completely at his mercy. His meeting with the Imperial courier couldn't have worked better if arranged by Von Ludendorff.

The train stopped at Brandenburg, Von Ridder buckled on belt and pistol, hung the precious dispatch case over his shoulder and got off without question. Ottendorfer was waiting on the platform. He piloted the two officers to the car, opened the door for them and closed it behind them.

Elton centered his eyes out the window as the sedan moved out on the last leg of the journey to Berlin. Von Ridder was

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suddenly on Elton's conscience. Orders were to kill the German. Not in vengeance but simply because that was the only discreet course in such a situation. Mile after mile Brandenburg sank into the distance. The hazy gray smudge over Berlin presently lay across the horizon. Elton pulled himself together as they entered a long stretch of wooded tangle.

"Herr captain," he said, "I have one more thing to say to you—but I must say it in private."

"Please speak freely," said Von Ridder, leaning close.

"But I can't risk such a thing in the presence of these soldiers. Here, I'll stop the car and we'll step to one side for a moment."

"As you please," said Von Ridder.

The car shrieked to a stop at Elton's command. He led the way into the shrubbery, walking briskly. Von Ridder followed close behind. But at the end of a hundred meters the German halted.

"If you please," he complained mildly, "no one can possibly hear us now. What is it, *Herr Oberleutnant*, you've got to say that requires such secrecy?"

The blood was gone from Elton's face, but he spoke in a level, contained voice.

"I regret to have to tell you, Von Ridder," he said, "that you've blundered into an Allied trap. I came from Paris to get the papers you carry—and my orders are to kill you."

CHAPTER V.

WILHELMSTRASSE.

VON RIDDER started violently, the blood drained from his face. But he mastered himself promptly. For nearly a minute he merely looked at Elton while his mind searched out the ramifications of his plight. Then he must have accepted the fact that he was hopelessly trapped. He managed a drawn smile.

"The advantage seems to be all yours," he said in a hollow voice. He added with a touch of defiance, "Of course, you'll receive my papers only from my dead body since I will in no event surrender them to you!"

"I intend to give you a chance for your life, Von Ridder!" Elton rejoined. "You are armed and must know how to use your weapon."

Von Ridder smiled again, a heroic effort.

"I've had no training with a pistol, but suppose one needs only lift the hammer and press the trigger. Isn't that so?"

"I'll give you this advantage, Von Ridder. You may take your Lüger from its holster. Then you'll need only to lift the hammer, raise the pistol and fire. I'll draw from the buttoned holster. That should give you at least a fighting chance for your life."

Von Ridder nodded, a strangely puzzled light in his eyes. He took his pistol from its case and examined it gingerly.

"That is fairer than shooting me down in cold blood," he said.

Elton braced himself, his right hand taut behind the flap of his holster. His stiffened thumb must loosen the holster, his hand flick the Lüger into action before Von Ridder could fire.

"When I count three!" Elton warned.

Von Ridder accepted with another nod. But his eyes were not on Elton. Instead the German's gaze was centered upon the unaccustomed mechanism of his firearm as if it held for him some strange fascination. Elton gave a sharp warning command and began counting.

"One—two—"

Von Ridder stiffened and pulled back the hammer of his Lüger. But Elton saw in swift appraisal that his foeman hadn't the remotest chance. The thought suddenly sickened him. This was nothing more than shooting a man down in cold blood.

On sudden impulse he cast aside his weapon and leaped forward, levelling a devastating fist at Von Ridder's jaw. The blow staggered the German. A second blow put him down and out.

Elton took his waist belt and Von Ridder's, lashed the dazed German to the bole of a young ash tree. With the lacings from Von Ridder's shoes he fashioned a gag.

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After ten minutes of careful work he had the German secured against the possibility of escape. Von Ridder had recovered his senses.

"Sorry," Elton said brusquely. "But that was better than killing you. I'm afraid you'll have a couple of very uncomfortable days here, Von Ridder. But I'll put a marker out on the road—and I'll see that you are released as soon as possible."

With Von Ridder's precious dispatch case, Elton returned to the sedan. In the faces of Ottendorfer and Waldsiemuller there was registered no curiosity at the failure of the Herr captain to return to the car. At Elton's command they drove off.

"Through the Brandenburg gate," he instructed, "and drive through Unter den Linden to Wilhelmstrasse. We haven't a minute to waste en route."

Elton checked through the vital papers from Von Ridder's dispatch case, making hasty notes of the principal points of distribution of those million men from the Western front. He saw that the larger concentrations were along the northern segments of the Western front which meant another titanic smash against Paris, a vast military hammerhead intended to make the battle line an east and west line from Paris to Verdun.

But on such technical deductions he spent little time. That was for the higher tactical staffs to determine—his own part to secure the information for which he had been sent. And if successful in Wilhelmstrasse he would carry back to Paris the schedule of train movements that would reveal everything to the Allied command.

ELTON was comfortably at ease as the car passed down the broad traffic lanes of Unter den Linden. So far as any sense of stress or strain, he could have been no more completely in possession of his faculties on the Champs Élysées.

Without permitting the thought to weigh upon him he knew that he now faced the most desperate gamble of all. Perhaps only a miracle could see him through. Wilhelmstrasse was filled with pedestrians, horsecabs, official sedans, bustling military and diplomatic attachés, soldiers on leave.

Yet there was little about the place to suggest that here was the sinister brain center of a world at war, the breeding place of a colossal mischief designed to bring the universe under the Kaiser's command.

He directed Waldsiemuller to stop in front of the Imperial chancellory and wait. Suspicious eyes, searching every face, alert for slightest omen of treachery, hardly would expect the Allied secret service to send its man by official German staff car, manned by German soldiers.

But as he strode inside Elton knew by what a slender thread his venture hung. Behind him was a dubious trail—missing soldiers, a reserve lieutenant committed to a madman's cell, the missing Von Ridder. And here in Wilhelmstrasse must be sensitive intuitions as well as sharp suspicions. His own weapons were audacity, quick resourcefulness and a not-too-plausible masquerade.

In the military section, several German officers loitered in a large waiting hall. Elton knew that their function was to observe and appraise all official visitors. But he argued that they would find nothing unusual in the presence of an official courier from the front, especially when that courier was in proper uniform, marched with the proper gait and had every outward semblance of the rôle in which he presented himself.

As for being recognized, he felt that was the least danger he must fear. In the Imperial secret service there was but one agent who had seen Elton in official rôle. That officer, Captain Konrad Eckbert, was on duty as German attaché at Berne; the French attaché had verified that important fact immediately before Elton left Paris.

"I've an appointment with his Excellency the Captain General, military adviser of the chancellery," he announced to a commissioned majordomo. "I have to report that I am an officer-courier from Spa. His Excellency will understand."

The captain general, to whose private sanctum Elton was escorted promptly, was

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a wizened, bald little man with blunt martial features which became grotesque when he looked up through thick prism glasses that magnified his eyes into staring black orbs. His bushy gray brows lifted in astonishment at seeing Elton.

"You're not Von Ridder!" he blurted.

"I'm Oberleutnant Muhlenberg," Elton said. "I bring the papers Captain von Ridder was supposed to bring."

"But the Herr Fieldmarshal telegraphed that Von Ridder had left," the general fretted, evidently disturbed by any slight upset in ordered routine. "What happened to Von Ridder?"

"He was unable to come, *Excellenz*," Elton said. "At the last minute—even after he left headquarters—he met with an accident. It was necessary, therefore, for me to come."

"Injured?" the general scolded. "How injured?"

"I'm not prepared to furnish you all the details, *Excellenz*. But I do know Von Ridder suffered, in some manner, a painful injury to his jaw. For the time being he's unable to speak or masticate his food."

"Very well," the general grumbled, thrusting forward a mummified hand. "Let me have your dispatches."

THE captain general took the Von Ridder document and went through it with characteristic German military thoroughness. For half an hour Elton was left standing at attention before his excellency's desk while every notation was read and checked against the general's notes. Then the little man muttered something to himself, got up and disappeared through a private door at the rear of his quarters. Another half hour passed before the captain general returned.

In his hand he carried a thick sheaf of onion-skin papers. These he sealed into a stout Manila envelope and handed them to Elton.

"You'll deliver these at once to the Herr Fieldmarshal at field headquarters!" he directed.

"Yes, *Excellenz*," said Elton, bowing stiffly from the waist. He placed the envelope in his dispatch case and swung on his heel.

Elton's nerves were taut as he left the captain general's rooms behind. The importance of the papers he carried in Von Ridder's leather dispatch case stripped him for the moment of his habit of cool unconcern in the face of critical danger. With success in sight he knew that he had left behind him a danger that might strip him of his masquerade even before he could leave Berlin behind.

For even if the general had displayed no slightest suspicion, he had fussed inordinately over the substitution of couriers. Such a substitution, without the formality of official telegraphic confirmation, would rankle deeply in the breast of such an officer, steeped in a lifetime of Prussian military exactitude and German thoroughness. Therefore, when he notified Spa that Muhlenberg had left Berlin, he would be certain to make some terse reference to Von Ridder. That would set the wires burning instantly.

But as Elton passed outside, that danger suddenly vanished in thin air. Before his eyes, as if wrought by some sinister magic, was another and unmistakable danger—the last one he had expected to face. Captain Konrad Eckbert was mounting the stone steps. Eckbert came to an abrupt stop, as if stunned momentarily by the shock of recognition.

CHAPTER VI.

TANGLED ROUTES.

ELTON did not hesitate. He stalked up to Eckbert and spoke in a low commanding voice, a hand in his pocket thrust forward menacingly.

"I have the advantage, Eckbert," he said. "In my pocket I carry a small automatic which is aimed at you. I will not hesitate to pull the trigger if necessary."

Eckbert gave a taunting laugh.

"An Allied spy in Wilhelmstrasse, eh?"

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he sneered. "*Ja*—threatening an Imperial officer on the steps of the chancellory. Do you think for a minute you can bluff me out this way?"

"I'm not bluffing, Eckbert. You'll do as I say or I'll kill you!"

"You'd be shot down the next minute, you impudent swine!"

"Which would be vastly better than a firing squad. Now turn about as if nothing had happened. I want a brief conversation with you—alone!"

Eckbert laughed again, a defiant sneer.

"I'll see you hanged first!"

"You forget, Herr captain," Elton rejoined tartly, "that you wouldn't live to see me hanged. I'll give you until I count three to make up your mind."

Eckbert read the grim determination of the man in front of him. His eyes narrowed, he swallowed hard several times and nodded. Elton caught him by the arm and they went together to the staff car. Eckbert hesitated an instant, then stepped inside, his mind plainly made up to watch his opportunity for the upper hand.

"Why do you behave so?" Eckbert complained as the car moved off. His voice was conciliatory now, with an injured note. "You startled me when I saw you at the chancellory—but how was I to know you are an agent-double?"

"I am not an agent-double," Elton rejoined. "I serve only one master."

"Of course, your pardon," said Eckbert. "But how was I to realize in a single instant that you are in the German service? You see, we in Switzerland know little of what goes on in our own secret service in Berlin and Spa."

"We'll discuss that frankly at the proper time, Eckbert," Elton replied.

The car turned into Unter den Linden and made its way to the Brandenburg gate. Elton observed Eckbert closely out of the corner of his eyes. A man of round fat face, small round eyes, a stubby round nose and thick, puffy round mouth, but of massive hulk, long, heavy arms and immense sinewy hands.

The play of the German's mind was easy to read. He had yielded on the steps of the chancellory only to bide his time. Now he was playing for his chance at attack.

"But if I had known two good loyal German soldiers vouched for you, I never would have made the mistake I did, *Herr Oberleutnant*," Eckbert argued persuasively. "For of course two German soldiers would never cover up an Allied spy!"

Eckbert raised his voice as he said this, a play to test out the men in the front seat. Elton instantly thrust his Lüger against Eckbert's midriff.

"Keep quiet, Eckbert!" he commanded bruskly.

At Eckbert's mocking smile Elton bit his lips and stiffened. Eckbert had tricked him into tipping his hand, into telling Eckbert that the two men in front were German soldiers and not Allied henchmen. The car passed out through the Brandenburg gate. Elton directed Waldsiemuller into the route for Koln.

But he knew that such a route was untenable. It was not in line with reason that Berlin could fail to check him now. If nothing else, the inevitable telegram to Imperial headquarters that Oberleutnant Muhlenberg had cleared Berlin with those vital dispatches must set the wires buzzing and strip his masquerade.

THE sun was setting. But darkness would help little on the road to Koln. Once the trick at Wilhelmstrasse was uncovered the whole force of the Imperial secret service would be set in motion. Staff cars, motorcycles, local police would litter every road. All Germany would be aroused, every village and farm house notified. Escape would be impossible.

Eckbert leaped into the attack with deft fury. The German caught Elton's pistol arm in a clutch of steel, shouting savage expletives, gripping Elton's windpipe with his other hand. The two piled up in the tonneau of the car. Elton fought desperately but Eckbert had gained the first advantage and Elton found himself crushed under his foeman's bulk and superior strength.

"Stop the car, you infernal donkeys!"

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Eckbert bellowed to the soldiers. "Stop while we kill this spy!"

Elton broke the grip at his throat and maneuvered his knees for a thrust at Eckbert's stomach. Throwing all his strength into the effort he counter-attacked. But he failed to dislodge the desperate German agent. Eckbert was now goaded by a frenzy, Elton held the advantage of self-possession. Clearly he heard the screeching of brakes, felt the car come to a stop, sensed the movement of Waldsiemuller and Ottendorfer. Against three he knew he was helpless.

Gathering his strength he made a second attempt to free himself from Eckbert's grip and get his Lüger into play. The German clung with goaded determination. Then, as if by a miracle, Elton felt the other's bulk freed from over him. Shrieking savage oaths Eckbert was whisked from the tonneau, arms and legs flailing about impotently. Elton saw in a blur of swift action the towering young Waldsiemuller as he swung Eckbert over his head and pitched him into the road.

Waldsiemuller's blue eyes were blazing in a savage rage that matched those gorilla jaws.

But as he hit the ground, Eckbert lay stunned for only an instant, then brought his Lüger into the conflict. Waldsiemuller lunged towards his victim, but only Ottendorfer's quick intervention saved the wagoner. Ottendorfer's pistol cracked as Eckbert aimed. Eckbert collapsed, the impulse that had raised his weapon pressing the trigger as he dropped back in the throes of death. The bullet shattered a window of the sedan.

Ottendorfer turned slowly to Elton, fear racking his eyes.

"That was a spy I killed, *Herr Oberleutnant?*" he asked anxiously.

Elton looked back at him with level eyes.

"Remember this, Ottendorfer," he replied. "I killed that man, not you. No matter what happens now, I did the shooting. You had nothing to do with it—and neither did you, Waldsiemuller!"

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberleutnant,*" said Ottendorfer, "but I have no regrets at killing a spy!"

There reached Elton's ears in the next instant a distant shrieking of sirens, then a roar of motors. His ears identified what must be a motorcycle cavalcade—headed out the Brandenburg gate into the road to Koln.

He turned back to the car, found his monocle, coolly replaced it in his eye, smoothed out his uniform and gave calm instructions.

"Turn the car about, Waldsiemuller," he said. "We're driving back to Berlin."

The shrieking cavalcade swirled down upon him before the staff sedan was back in the road. Elton lighted a cigarette and waited. Twenty motorcycle police piled up in excited confusion, a major of Berlin police stalked up with drawn pistol.

"What's happened here!" he demanded.

"You're chasing an Allied spy who escaped from Wilhelmstrasse?" Elton inquired with a nonchalant arrogance.

"Yes, a spy who—"

ELTON smiled thinly and jerked a contemptuous finger to the body lying at the roadside.

"There's the dead body for you, Herr major," he said with amused gusto. "Did you think the staff had to depend upon you to wash its dirty linen? Well, have your men take the body to the Polizei Prasidium at Alexanderplatz. I'll follow along in my staff sedan. Move promptly, please, as I have no time to waste!"

The police major barked orders to his men. The body of Eckbert was dumped into a sidecar.

The major attempted questions but Elton shut him up with a sharp show of Imperial staff authority.

Elton followed the cavalcade at a distance. But as they approached the Brandenburg gate he ordered Waldsiemuller to drive slower. The police major went on into Berlin with sirens shrieking. Half a mile short of Unter den Linden Elton stopped the staff sedan and ordered Waldsiemuller and Ottendorfer outside.

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"I'll have to ask you for your pistols," he said in a low voice.

The two gave over their weapons without question. Elton tossed them into the sedan.

"I wish there was some suitable way I could thank you for all you've done," he said. "But there isn't. The most I can do is protect you the best way I know how. Now listen carefully. You're to go direct from here to the headquarters of police. Display your orders and tell everything that has happened to you—except one thing. I killed Eckbert—not you. Good-by and good luck."

Elton vaulted into the car and set it in motion, leaving his two unwitting henchmen staring manikins in the road. When he glanced back he saw them, gaping after him in the thickening dusk. He passed on in through the Brandenburg gate, doubled about and headed for Templehoferfeld.

His hole card. Elton knew this was his one chance, a last desperate gamble. Had the alarm been flashed to Templehoferfeld? If so he knew he was merely speeding into a trap, running up against a stone wall from which there would be no hope of escape.

He threw the throttle wide open. If he had a chance it was one against which every second was priceless. If the Germans had centered their pursuit upon a quarry observed leaving Berlin by staff car on the route to Koln, that last trick of his would not be discovered until the police reached Alexanderplatz. Perhaps not until Eckbert's body was identified, or until Waldsiemuller and Ottendorfer appeared.

On reaching Templehoferfeld he went direct to the Commandant. From one of the two dispatch cases he now carried, he extracted the forged French orders. Those orders, bearing the seal of Wilhelmstrasse, called for a plane to transport Oberleutnant Muhlenberg, Imperial courier, from Berlin to Spa.

The tension in Elton's muscles relaxed slightly as the Commandant nodded his bristling pompadour and blurted guttural orders. A pilot came hurrying.

"In ten minutes, *Herr Oberleutnant*, we will have a fast Hanoveraner ready for the air," the German aviation field commander announced.

ELTON helped himself to a seat and unconcernedly lighted a cigarette. Only by a supreme effort was he able to hold on to his self-control through the eternity of waiting that followed. He saw the plane rolled out, saw the ground men forcing the propellers, heard the engines cough, sputter and finally take hold in an even roar.

But his ears were straining for the tinkle of the telephone, or the roar of a motorcycle entering the field. The alarm might come at any instant. And an alarm now meant that he was nothing better than a rat in a trap. A hurried court, a firing squad or hangman's noose at sunrise.

He looked at his watch after an interminable period. Only five minutes had passed—half the time. Inwardly he cursed the precautions of that pilot. The evening was warm and the German airman should have been ready by now, he argued. A mild ague attacked his legs and hands. Many times he had faced death before, always with cool unconcern. But now, with these priceless dispatches in his possession, escape was a far more important thing than the incident of his life. He snapped his fingers contemptuously, pulled himself together and turned collectedly to the field commander.

"I have only a few minutes left," he said. "Will you please let me have an envelope and paper? I must make a report to his Excellency, the Captain General, before I leave off."

Elton wrote rapidly, in a bold clear hand, in English. The message read:

> Excellency:—At a point on the main highway westward to Koln, and seventeen kilometers east of the city of Brandenburg you will find a white handkerchief displayed from a willow. Going into the woods from that point you will find Captain von Ridder secured to the bole of a young sapling. He has not eaten since yesterday. Also, there will come to your attention two soldiers, Ottendorfer and Waldsiemuller. They obeyed orders which I forged. Both are loyal soldiers. Please credit wholly to my account

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the death of Herr Eckbert. And if you are inclined to be too severely critical of your subordinates in this matter, please remember it was you who handed me the secret dispatches which I am delivering to Paris. —American agent B-7.

He sealed the message into the envelope and handed it to the field commander, then walked out to the plane, a trim Hanoveraner. The pilot was a young reservist oberleutnant, thin, solemn, but with an alert hawkish face. The pilot climbed into the forward cockpit and Elton into the observer's seat behind.

A moment later the pilot eased open his throttle, thrust forward his stick and raced down the field for momentum. The big plane lifted from the ground as if shot from a gun, and set off to the west.

CHAPTER VII.

FORCED LANDINGS.

ELTON settled back in the cockpit. Night was thickening, Berlin behind. Such a plane as this Hanoveraner, with its cruising speed of better than a hundred miles an hour, should put them in Spa long before midnight. But Spa would be even more dangerous than Berlin since inevitably the warning would be flashed ahead by telephone and telegraph.

He rose presently in his cockpit and studied the lay of the plane. A pilot's training was part of Elton's equipment. But getting possession of the plane was another matter. A simple feat to put the German pilot out of commission with a blow from a fire extinguisher, flare-pistol or the butt of his Lüger. But the pilot's body would slump down on the controls and send the plane into a dive before Elton could act.

Long before the plane reached Koln, he guessed, the whole region beyond the Rhine would be on the alert. Plane detectors would be straining for the Hanoveraner, fleets of pursuit planes would be ready to take the air, searchlights would be placed in readiness along the probable line of flight down the Western front.

The sky was filled with bright stars. And before the plane reached the Rhine there would be a full moon. But Elton knew that a thousand German planes, searching the air west of Koln, would come upon him only by a miracle. The problem was that of this beakish pilot. The pilot had his orders—to deliver an Imperial courier at Spa. It was not a part of German training to accept from a junior officer, even of the Imperial staff, instructions to fly beyond that objective, especially when such a flight would carry his plane over enemy terrain.

Elton made his plan, the only one open to him. If it meant desperate chances, at least the chances were less critical than taking over in mid-air.

"It is necessary for me to stop at the aviation field in Koln!" he shouted to the pilot through the earphone.

"But the field at Koln is not good for night landing," the pilot shouted back.

"Your Colonel should have told you," Elton rejoined impatiently. "It's necessary for the success of my mission to stop for a minute at Koln."

"Very good, if they'll put out flares for me," the pilot agreed.

The plane swept on with the speed of the wind. Elton searched out in every detail the part he must play on the landing field at Koln. If the warning had reached Koln, the coup he planned would be a precarious one. If he dropped into Koln unsuspected, there should be small doubt of success.

The moon came out, round and full, bathing the heavens and earth below in mellow light. Underneath he could catch plainly an occasional glimmer of light. He guessed they were flying at an altitude of five thousand meters. Again and again he rehearsed his plan at Koln, carefully measuring the lay of the plane, the fast moves that he must make.

The play of moonlight on a broad ribbon of water sent his muscles taut. It must be the Rhine, which meant that in a few minutes they would drop into Koln. He loosened the thin metal tube of the fire extinguisher and placed it between his knees.

The plane circled low. Elton caught the

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massive shadows of a large city. An immense, spectral finger loomed into the sky on the Hanoveraner's port side. He identified it as the great spire of the Koln cathedral. Another minute and the pilot let go a landing flare. But instead of trying to effect an immediate landing, he circled several times until the airfield below was lighted for him, then dropped down.

As the swift plane swept down the airfield to a smooth landing, Elton caught signs of unmistakable alarm. Excited figures ran towards the plane. He saw the glint of moonlight on bayonets and knew that the soldiery at Koln was massing down in force.

Elton caught up the metal tube and sprang deftly forward. The plane was almost at a stop when he reached his point of vantage back of the pilot's cockpit.

"Sorry, *Herr Oberleutnant!*" he shouted.

He struck the pilot a staggering blow across the skull with the tube and vaulted into the cockpit on top of his victim. Releasing the pilot's belt he threw the barely conscious German bodily over the side. Then he pulled open the throttle and shoved forward the stick to lift the Hanoveraner's tail off the ground.

THE big ship leaped forward. Elton saw, rather than heard, the crash of a bullet through the fuselage. Over the rim of his cockpit he saw an arm, the top of a helmet. But to this he paid no immediate attention. He was gauging the speed of the plane, watching for the moment when he could lift the craft into the air. A minute later he slowly pulled back his stick and the Hanoveraner vaulted out of the field towards the skyline.

He took altitude rapidly and set his course due south, instead of west. After judging that he was clear of Koln he headed west. The craft responded perfectly to his control. He set her ahead into full speed.

His eyes centered on that arm thrown over the top of the cockpit. A few inches in front was the German's left hand, nails dug in, clinging frantically. Arm and hand attested the goaded struggle of the man for his life. Twice Elton saw the fellow's head rise into view as he fought to get to a point of safety. The helmet was gone, the German's long black hair tossing in the wind.

Instinctively Elton reached for the metal tube with which he had felled the pilot. He poised it, then laid it aside. If the German got a secure hold with his legs in a strut he might be able to weather the storm. But there was little present danger of his making it into the cockpit.

Elton tried to lay his plans. He knew that his skill as a pilot was good for a conventional landing on a marked field in daylight. As for an emergency landing—heaven knew where, that would be largely a matter of trusting to luck. He caught fingers of light playing across the heavens in front of him. The anti-aircraft batteries were sharply on the alert. He cut farther south and took altitude.

But his eyes kept returning to that arm looped into his cockpit. The tragedy held his interest with a grim sort of fascination. The German must have a prodigious strength to hold his grip under the terrific pressure of wind.

That arm told him how close had been the squeak at Koln. This German had been within reach of the pilot's cockpit when the plane taxied off down the field. Three seconds, possibly less, would have seen him catapulted in on Elton. Those three seconds had spelled the difference between Elton's life and this unseen foeman's.

An hour passed. The trim Hanoveraner's engines purred relentlessly. Elton guessed that he must be well over Belgium now. Another half hour would be sure to put him in Allied territory.

But where? Elton's brows knotted over that ominous question. By no conceivable chance would his skill put him into the flying field at Paris. At best he must make a random landing, somewhere in France or Belgium, west of the German lines of invasion.

He made a rapid calculation. Too long a flight might put him on over the channel, or the Atlantic. Too short a flight would bring him down within the German lines.

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He cursed the dire necessity that had forced him into this Hanoveraner as his own pilot.

AGAINST the moon he caught a plane, then another one. Instantly he headed downward. At a thousand meters he leveled out. German pursuit planes, he guessed, tearing the skies to ribbons. But unless they caught him against the moon their search was one of a needle in a haystack.

Elton turned again to the arm of his hapless passenger. He started at seeing the empty rim of the cockpit. That dive from above must have jolted the German loose, his last strength gone.

When he had been flying two hours out of Koln, Elton decided on landing. He dropped to a hundred meters. There were rugged foothills, he saw, and heavy timber. He rose and continued on for another fifteen minutes. If his estimates of location were worth anything he judged he must be flying over northern France, perhaps lower Belgium.

Again he dropped low. The earth masses appeared to be less rugged now. He threw over a landing flare and circled to observe. The flare sent a fountain of light down on a broad wide plain. He circled once more and dropped a second flare. This time he thought he saw houses, a small cluster with wide, broad roofs.

The way seemed clear for setting his ship down. But he knew the dangers of small experience in such a landing. Then, as he set his nose for the earth, flares began leaping into the air. A dozen of them, marking the outlines of a landing field.

He smiled over this miracle of good fortune and dropped in. The earth seemed a dozen meters below him yet when he felt the sudden impact of hard ground. He knew instinctively that he had made a two-point landing and at too high a speed. He pulled back the stick. Even as the plane went hurtling he knew that he had maneuvered into a ground loop that must pile the Hanoveraner on her nose.

There was a smashing succession of events, then a void. Elton, groping in that gray borderline that lies between consciousness and unconsciousness, between life and death, awakened to a hammering pain in his head. He opened his eyes and looked about. He was in a small room, several blurred figures standing by his cot. He heard a voice.

"I say, he is coming into his senses, what?"

Elton's head cleared rapidly; he managed to focus his eyes. He smiled and raised himself to his elbow at sight of British uniforms. Then he tried legs and arms and found he was not seriously injured. He sat up and his smile widened.

"Reckon I made a poor landing, gentlemen," he said. "Thanks for picking me up and patching me. What time is it?"

A face thrust itself close to his and studied him with a startled grimace.

"Aye, Cap'n Bateson, the bally German's awake—and it's the same one as gave us some of his arrogance coming up on the train to Noyon!"

"My word and so it is!" exclaimed Bateson. "And didn't I tell you the boorish lout was a spy, eh, Carew?"

"But it was me figgered that first, Captain Bateson!" Carew protested.

"Pardon, gentlemen," Elton interposed, "but I asked you the time. Would you be good enough to answer my question?"

"About three hours until sunrise!" Bateson retorted hotly. "And if it wasn't for waking up me colonel, I'd see to it he had your bally carcass ready for a firing squad by that time, what!"

"But I must insist you wake up your colonel," Elton replied, smiling with polite firmness. "However, instead of a firing squad I'll be troubling him for another fast plane. If you'll get your British headquarters on the long distance for me, I'll have things made a bit clearer for you, despite my Prussian uniform—and if your colonel recommends your skill as a pilot, I may ask to have you fly me down to Paris—despite your rather insulting conduct on the train a few days ago."

THE END

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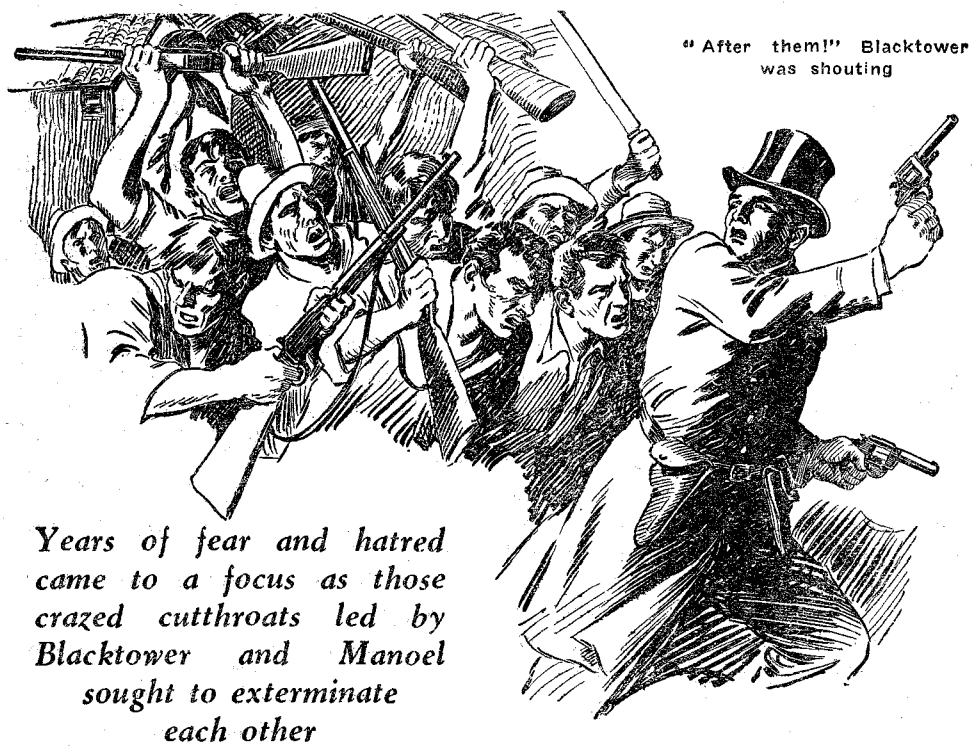
Sink of Iniquity

By HULBERT FOOTNER



"After them!" Blacktower was shouting

Years of fear and hatred came to a focus as those crazed cutthroats led by Blacktower and Manoel sought to exterminate each other

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ALTHOUGH it was with a mixture of joy and hate that Leggy MacArdle felt when he chanced to meet his old hated enemy, Jack Beatty, down in the Amazonas country of South America, Leggy nevertheless braced Beatty for a job. Beatty, known among the natives as "Torrenegro" (Blacktower), was the proprietor of a gambling joint in the inland town of Bom Successo, a refuge for wanted men and lawless toughs of all nations. Leggy is hired by Beatty as a house-servant. Although his duties are humiliating, the job gives Leggy an opportunity to avenge himself on the man who had once caused his ruin in New York City.

The town of Bom Successo boasted of a small theater which gave cheap vaudeville entertainment. The favorite among the girls of the company under the direction of the unscrupulous Manoel and his wife, Pepita, is Fay La Rosadora. She is the toast of the town, having as her special admirers Blacktower, Manoel (hampered by the presence of his wife), and Leggy MacArdle.

Blacktower has plans for kidnaping Fay, but Leggy also has his own ideas. With the help of Ria, a maid for Pepita and Fay, Leggy contrived to get an impression of the key to Fay's room, and writes her a message asking that she meet him secretly in the theater during the early morning hours. Since Fay is practically a prisoner in the hands of Manoel and Pepita, Blacktower proposes to Leggy that he shoot Manoel. Leggy undertakes the job, and bungles it, making Manoel extremely suspicious of Blacktower's movements.

Leggy and Fay meet at the theater and he learns that Fay still loves him. They are surprised by Pepita, who unexpectedly suggests that Leggy take Fay and she will help. Leggy visits On Kai Ling, Chinese trader of Bom Successo, and enlists his aid. Ling is agreeable since it is to his advantage to have the disrupting influence of Fay away, inasmuch as her presence is inciting a race war.

This story began in the Argosy for May 25

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Ria comes to Leggy to tell him that Pepita is dying. He suspects that Manoel has poisoned her, and Leggy and Blacktower reach Pepita before she dies. Doctor Buckles, the physician, makes an analysis and finds that Pepita died of arsenic.

CHAPTER XIV.

REPRISAL.

SOON they were back at Blacktower's again. The boss received them in a sour silence. He had closed up the gambling house, and put his cash in the safe. They were eighteen now, because Crummy Carl had likewise shut up shop, and brought his bartenders, a couple of young Irish fellows thick in the wits maybe, but thick in the limbs, too. Not all of these men were members of the committee.

Doc followed the last man in. "Pepita was poisoned with arsenic," he announced.

The men scowled and muttered. Only Blacktower's face cleared. He was his own man again. "Come on, men!" he said. "Let's get Manoel!"

"Wait a minute," said Dan Beasley.

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" cried Blacktower. "Must you still be talking about it?"

The white-faced Hamill intervened. "Aah, you needn't think we're going to hand the girl over to you, Black!"

It was the thought in every man's mind. Their faces revealed it.

"Well, are *you* going to take her, runt?" retorted Blacktower.

Dan Beasley wagged his big hand. "Wa-a-it a minute!" he drawled. "We got to act as one man in this affair, or we might as well chuck our guns in the drink and wait for our throats to be cut! . . . *Nobody's* going to take the girl!"

"She can't live here without a man's protection!"

"Sure! But she gets a free choice, see? Am I right, men?"

A unanimous chorus answered him. "Sure! . . . That's the ticket! . . . A free choice! . . . That's fair!"

Leggy was watching Blacktower. The boss' face turned masklike.

He said indifferently: "Suits me all right."

"When we take Manoel," Dan went on. "La Rosadora stays in the hotel with the other girls. She has her own room there, and the place is big enough so that some of the committee can be there on guard the whole time."

Blacktower looked surprised. This was more constructive than he expected from the muzzy-headed Dan.

"Are we going to operate the joint?" asked Osman slyly.

When the laughter had subsided, Dan said: "Let every man present raise his right hand and swear that he will stand by the girl's choice."

They swore it, Blacktower with the rest. Doc looked over at Leggy humorously. Your work! his eyes said.

"Now we're all set," said Dan. "Men, from this moment Black is our leader. Whatever he says, goes!"

They set off over the bridge in a good humor. Perfect harmony now between leader and men—anyhow, apparent harmony.

Reaching the Avenida, Blacktower issued his first order: "Straggle out as we go through. We're not parading."

Business was good in the rum-shops. The theater was lighted up, and the orchestra sawing away inside. The show had not yet started; men were going in. Blacktower sent Leggy on to reconnoiter the entrance, while he and the rest distributed themselves casually at the four corners where the lanes crossed.

Leggy found "Juize" Cavados, Manoel's right-hand man, taking the money at the table beside the entrance gate. The "Juize" was an under-sized brown man with a long thin face like a horse, who wore a high celluloid collar to promote his dignity. He was said to be the brains of Manoel's outfit. Opposite him lounged a brawny caboclo, ready for anybody who might try to rush the gate. A wooden screen within cut off all view of the interior.

"Where's Manoel?" asked Leggy.

"Who want Manoel?"

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"Blacktower send letter."

"Give it to me."

"No. Only to Manoel."

"Manoel in his bed," said Juize severely. "He bad tonight. Nobody can see him."

"All right," said Leggy. "I come back tomorrow."

When Leggy reported to the boss, the latter growled: "So much the better. We can take him easier in the hotel."

SINGLY and in couples they drifted on casually to the wall surrounding the hotel yard. "If the men in the yard offer any resistance shoot to kill," Blacktower whispered to one and another.

Somehow the hotel did not look right. Too quiet; no lights in the upper windows; a faint pinkish glow reflected from the plastered wall. At Blacktower's whispered command, one of the Irish lads gave little Hamill a boost so that he could look over the wall.

Instantly there was a shot from in the yard, and Hamill dropped to the ground with a bullet hole through his hat. "Close," he said, panting a little. "There's a hundred men in the yard. Armed, and lying around a couple of little fires."

Blacktower immediately drew his men away. They halted under the wall of the theater. If he was disconcerted by this formidable resistance, his face didn't show it. He said:

"Tomorrow we'll organize a strong enough party to smoke out this skunk. In the meantime, we can't let the girl stay in there. Go into the theater everybody."

"Manoel will never let her show tonight," growled Beasley.

"If he don't, we'll have plenty of help in wrecking the place," said Blacktower dryly. "All those men in there have put up five dollars to see her."

"Where did Manoel get the guns to arm a hundred men?" somebody muttered.

"Reckon this is the scenery for the new show which came on the steamboat," said Doc dryly.

There was a silence. The men avoided looking at each other. The joke was on them, and it was a damned bad one. Their bitterness was too deep for cursing.

"Well . . . we'll get him!" growled Dan Beasley.

"Hear me, men," said Blacktower softly. "Go in singly and in couples. Spread yourselves around inside, but all sit where you can see me. Do a little quiet recruiting if you get the chance. These seringueiros are fighting men. And nobody has any strings on them. Get them on our side. Tell them to come and see me. But don't start anything in the theater until we have the girl safe. I'll give you your cue."

Doc Buckles and Leggy, who stuck together, were amongst the first of the white men to enter the theater. Juize Cavados stared hard at Leggy when he saw him again, but he couldn't refuse their money. The interior was painted green with clumsy scroll-work in white. All the tables and chairs were of iron with paint and rust flaking off. The show was late in starting that night; the curtain was still down. Dampness had reduced the painting on the curtain to a moldy reddish smudge. It was held down by a heavy wooden roller.

Something under two hundred men—mostly rubber-gatherers—were drinking at the little tables. Dirty, ragged, hairy as they were, these fellows were a long cut above the caboclos who hung around camp. They were their own masters with money to spend. Adventurers from every quarter of the globe were included; white, brown, black, yellow—even red. For with rubber at three dollars a pound the Indians sent in their delegates with the tribal quota of black pills. So far the men were quiet, only stamping and whistling for the show to start.

THE curtain rolled up clumsily, and the entire troupe came mincing out from the wings, ten girls in tights, all with different shaped legs, none of them true. They smiled like chromos and went through their motions. In their painted faces the eyes showed muddy and sick. Leggy felt sorry for them. They began to sink in voices like creaking slate pencils.

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"Do they *have* to sing like that?" he muttered.

"That's camp style," said Doc. "Established since '49."

After the ensemble, a little girl called "Clo-Clo" sang a song in Portuguese. She was popular with the Latins. The other girls came through the little door and down the steps, each swaying in the same cut-and-dried manner. To mix with the audience they had put on dresses like abbreviated Mother Hubbard gowns. Under their fixed smiles they were shaking with nervousness. Carlotta, who had seated herself with three white men at the next table, suddenly burst into tears and ran back through the little door.

"We never said nothing to her!" muttered the men, looking at each other. The waiter asked them to excuse her "on account of death in the family."

One of these white men was a long lad whose beard still grew in tufts. Doc and Leggy asked him over and bought him a drink. Nineteen years old and had spent three of them in the jungle. Tough as an alligator hide, and proud of it. Leggy told him of the situation, and he swore he'd be on their side and bring his partners. Fringe Penrose was his name. He went back to tell his friends the story.

Leggy's eyes remained fixed on the stage, but he only took in the show in spots. His mind was always hurrying forward to the end. When the comedians dawdled, or the girls flirted, he muttered: "Aah, get on with it! Get on with it!" He didn't know he was speaking aloud until he saw Doc grinning. Doc himself, though he grinned, was pale with suspense.

At last, after an endless silly olio in which all took part, the curtain fell with a thump on the stage. This was the moment when Manoel always came out in front and announced: "La Rosadora, the peerless!" No Manoel tonight. After an unbearable wait the curtain rolled up slowly, revealing an empty stage with the same faded scenery representing a garden. The orchestra started to play "A Newsboy's Love Song" and Leggy ground his teeth together.

She came out on the stage, pale, smiling, frightened. Crown of red hair, light green dress, silver slippers. A few started to applaud, and were angrily told by many to shut up. Then there was complete silence in the hall. Her eyes found Leggy in the pool of faces before her, and a little color came into her face. She started to sing in a shaking voice.

Blacktower sat at a table in the middle of the front row. He stood up saying in his resonant voice: "La Rosadora, your friends are here . . ."

The song stopped on a gasp. The orchestra straggled to silence, one instrument leaving off, then another. The seringueiros gaped at the speaker blankly.

Blacktower with a gesture invited his men to rise. All around the hall they stood up. "These are men of your own country," he said. "They have pledged themselves to take care of you. Come with us!" He put up his hands to help her down from the stage.

BUT Fay stood staring, frozen with terror. Before she could recover herself, somebody released the curtain and the heavy roller banged down in front, blotting her out. A muffled scream reached their ears. Blacktower, with an oath, knocked aside fiddler and cornetist who stood in his way, and leaped on the stage. Drawing a knife, he slashed a long rent in the curtain, and tore it apart. Then all the lights in the house went out.

For an instant there was silence except for a vague scuffling in the wings, a smothered piteous cry; then a deafening uproar broke out in the house like an explosion; curses, yells, shots. The Latins, true to their custom, were firing in the air. The iron tables and chairs were thrown over; glasses crashed. The whole crowd seemed to be rushing back and forth blindly in the dark. Many made for the entrance door, others attacked the men nearest them out of sheer love of fighting.

Leggy cried to Doc: "The little door!" They sprang for it together. It was locked. They put their shoulders against it but

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could get no purchase on account of the steps outside. Leggy ran back feeling for the nearest table. Grasping it by the legs, he yelled: "Get out of the way!" and brought it crashing against the door. It flew in. All was dark and quiet on the stage. He groped ahead.

"Wait! I have matches!" shouted Doc behind him. Doc got a match lighted and found the switchboard beside him. He pulled down all the levers in sight, and the lights went up everywhere. Out in the hall the noise of the fighting stopped—and was renewed again. Infernal yelling, crashes and blows.

They came face to face with Blacktower coming off the scene. The rest of the men were pushing through the torn curtain, or running up the steps. All the actors had vanished. "Where are they? Where are they?" men were demanding, looking behind things.

"Door into the hotel," said Leggy. "Somewhere on this side."

They found it behind a pile of leaning scenery. Three men put their shoulders to it, but it was held by an iron bar, and their efforts were useless.

"Shove the scenery out of the way!" shouted Leggy, running back to get the table.

He swung it with all his strength, but this door held under the crash, though he split a panel of it. As he raised the table for another swing a voice came through, saying: "We got a machine gun here. If you come any further we'll blow you to hell!"

Leggy lowered the table. A dead silence fell on the group of men. They tasted gall. Leggy motioned them back out of range, and picked up the table again. "Let's see if he's lying," he muttered.

HE stood to one side of the door, and swung. This blow broke a second panel. But instantly the gun roared from the other side, and a burst of bullets splintered through the wood. The rattle of the gun stilled the noise out in the hall as if by magic. The gun ceased, and in the strange silence which followed, they heard a laugh from the other side of the door. The same voice asked: "Are you satisfied, or do you want another dose?"

Blacktower raised his hands and let them fall. Every man understood the gesture. They began to move softly away from there. Those who were to the left of the door, dropped to the floor and wriggled across below the broken panels. All went out through the curtain, because the gun commanded the little door.

Leggy hung back. The necessity of retreating nearly broke his heart. "I can't!" he groaned to Doc, who was pulling at his arm. "Fay is in there!"

"Quiet!" whispered Doc. "You're giving yourself away!"

"Look, I'll stay here and watch him," said Leggy, trying to persuade Doc how reasonable he was. "He's bound to show himself some time. I'll tease him until he shoots the door to pieces. Then I can see him. I'll use the iron table top for a shield. I'll get him!"

"Come away, you fool!" said Doc. "You got to look around your shield to see him, ain't you? And a machine gun shoots all over the place. You won't save her by getting yourself shot."

Leggy submitted, cursing his fate. Fay in there with that beast!

As they pushed through the torn curtain, he surveyed the hall in surprise. Quiet already? Empty? In two or three minutes they had made a complete job of the place.

They pushed their way through the scared crowd peering in at the door. Leggy didn't realize that he was reeling on his feet until Doc grabbed his arm and told him to brace up. Doc led him into the laboratory.

"When did you last have a good sleep?" he asked.

"Don't remember," muttered Leggy. "Come on, let's go to Blacktower's. They'll be having a meeting."

"You got to have a pick-me-up before you can go to a meeting," said Doc. He mixed something in a cup and Leggy obediently drank it off. A delicious paralysis

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began to creep through his limbs. He fought against it.

"What was in that cup?" he demanded. "I'm not going to sleep! You said a pick-me-up! You're a rotten friend! . . ."

Even while he was cursing Doc he sank down on the edge of his bed. Doc gave him a little push, and he knew nothing more.

CHAPTER XV.

DANGEROUS MISSION.

LEGGY woke up lapped in peace. But not for long. Recollection returned, and he sprang up cursing himself. Sleeping while Fay was a prisoner! It was daylight, but the shack was darkish; door closed, window shuttered. What light there was came in at the back. He saw Doc Buckles leaning across the front table, peering sideways through the shutter.

Doc interrupted Leggy's cursing by saying quietly: "We got to get out of here now."

"Why?" demanded Leggy.

"Manoel's scouts working down the Avenida. Dodging from building to building. Here, give me a hand with this, and out the back. I made a couple of trips with the lighter stuff."

Doc had packed his test tubes, notebooks and medical works in a wooden chest with rope handles. "Nobody in this living world gives a damn about my work," he said flippantly, "but it intrigues me."

They ran the chest through the back door. This brought them out on the creek. Ten o'clock, Leggy saw, glancing at the sun. The full heat of the day was spreading. Running along the edge of the bank behind the buildings, they worked back to the Avenida in front of a sprawling barricade composed of planks, timbers, logs, boxes, whatever could be snatched up. A gun barrel poled out between the planks, and a voice demanded: "Who are you?"

"White men like yourself," said Doc coolly. "Here, catch this!"

They slung the box up on top of the pile, and clambered after it. Four hairy seringueiros were guarding it. Doc said:

"The Negroes are creeping down the Avenida."

"Good! We'll give 'em the glad hand!"

Behind the temporary barricade a straggling line of men was digging a trench clean across from the creek to the dry gulley. This work when finished would cover Blacktower's buildings, the Chinese outfit, the ice and electric plant and the deep-water landing. Blacktower's men and the seringueiros were shovelling side by side. There were only half-enough shovels to go around, and the men spelled each other. There was incessant quarreling among the seringueiros.

"So the seringueiros came in with us," said Leggy.

"Sure, Blacktower squared them," said Doc. "Good fighters," he added, "but hellish unreliable troops. This isn't their war. Their boats are drawn up along the shore. If anything doesn't please them, all they've got to do is paddle off."

Beyond the trench, Leggy could see On Kai Ling's Chinese clerks hurrying across the little plaza carrying boxes, and returning empty-handed.

"All food and ammunition is being stored in the ice-plant," Doc explained. "It's the nearest thing to a fire-proof building in camp. There's a well inside, too."

They carried Doc's chest into the corrugated-iron building and set it down in a far corner. "War is hell on the sciences," Doc remarked. Coming out, they met Blacktower making his rounds, a resolute figure buttoned up in his frock coat, top-hat just so. A couple of holsters strapped around his waist added a warlike touch. He turned a hard eye on Leggy.

"Where the hell you been?"

"Sleeping," said Leggy.

"Get to work on the trench. You, Doc, fix a place where you can take care of wounded men if we have any."

Leggy walked away churning with an unbearable bitterness. Set to work like a navvy while the muckamucks of camp made their plans to rescue his wife! What were they up to anyhow? Was he to be kept out

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of everything? I will go nuts for certain, he thought, if I don't get into action!

He took a shovel from a man who was dropping it, and made the dirt fly. Later, when he spelled, Doc walked around that way, just to relieve his feelings.

LEGGY had not been working above an hour, when Blacktower sent George to summon him to the house. Leggy found the salon stripped of its elegant furnishings. There was a guard out on the veranda watching the gully. Blacktower had a group of the principal men around him. Mike Figuroa, Jao Gonzales and the other Brazilians who had a stake in the camp, had joined up, but they looked uneasy. They were not at home on this side.

MacGregor reported that he had got steam up.

"Where's Fazenda?" demanded Blacktower. Fazenda was the captain of the steamboat. Nobody knew where he was.

"I didn't order the fires lighted," said Blacktower coldly.

"What good is a steamboat without steam?" said MacGregor. "Don't you want me to go out and fetch help?"

"This will be settled before you could get out to Manaos and back," said Blacktower grimly. "And anyhow, what help is there for us in Manaos? Government soldiers? Where did Manoel get his shipment of arms and ammunition? We'll help ourselves."

"Well, if necessary, she can carry us all away from here."

"We're not leaving," said Blacktower.

He turned his attention to Leggy. "Before I can make an attack," he said, "I've got to know what Manoel is doing. How has he got his men disposed? Where is the machine gun posted? What's he planning? You're said to be the fastest runner in camp. Will you go? . . . Understand, I'm not ordering you to go." He added with a peculiar smile, "But I thought you'd appreciate the honor."

Leggy did not hesitate. "Sure!" he said.

"This is murder!" muttered Doc under his breath beside him.

"Shut up!" whispered Leggy. "It's what I want!"

"What can you do in broad day with your white skin?"

"I'll stain it with coffee extract."

Leggy got food in Blacktower's kitchen, stained his skin, and put on the sort of rags that were popular in Bum Success. The dark glasses were given up. He provided himself with a keen knife, in case he was obliged to strike silently. He looked over the ground to choose the best way out, and all the possible ways of getting in again.

Blacktower's position was a strong one. His left was protected by the soft mud of the creek shore, his right by the gully filled with bamboo thickets and jungle scrub. The old bunk-house next door to the ice-plant and a resort across the plaza known as the hop-house had been partly pulled down to make way for the trench. When the trench was completed, it was intended to demolish the buildings on the other side and the temporary barricades in order to deprive the enemy of cover. All the boats were supposed to be in Blacktower's possession.

Leggy crept out through the gully. It was his first go at the jungle. It took it out of you with the temperature at a hundred or more, and not a breath of air stirring. The earth steamed like a blanket in the washtub. He made way very slowly. Creepers, thorns, branches were inspired with a personal malice; tripped him, whipped his face, tore at his flesh when he wasn't looking. He could only saw gently with the machado; a chopping sound would have betrayed him. He had to be careful, too, not to cause the young growth and the ferns to sway over his head.

OCCASIONALLY he climbed the bank to take a survey. So far as he could see there was not a living soul left on this side of camp. Even so, it was none too easy when he had to come out in the open. He walked upright and unhurried with a cigarette hanging from his lips, caboclo style. To have ducked and run, to peer around corners and look over his

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shoulder, would only have called attention to himself. He trusted to his brown skin to get by.

As he crossed the end of the last lane, he got a nasty start. A hundred yards away it was barricaded where it crossed the Avenida. Surprised heads stuck over the top and voices yelled at him. He made a reassuring gesture and went on out of their sight. All right, so far. They were yelling to him to get behind the barrier or the gringoes would get him. But his heart beat like a trip hammer.

He went on beyond the last houses. Lying among the weeds, he looked across the clearing. He saw the smoke of several little fires rising at the edge of the jungle and naked brown forms moving among the trees. So Manoel had brought them into it! A chilly ripple passed over his skin. Leggy had had no contact with savages, but had heard all the stories about poisoned blow guns, head-hunters, and cannibal feasts. He drew back under cover of the houses.

Finally he arrived behind Jao Gonzales' place. It was a 'dobe structure with a low parapet raised above the roof on three sides for style. With the aid of a shed at the back Leggy climbed to the roof, and inched himself along under the parapet. Excellent cover, but he couldn't see anything. Voices all around.

He attacked the 'dobe with his knife. It crumbled easily. He started a funnel-shaped hole in the front parapet, working with extreme caution as the hole grew deeper. If he knocked a hunk of the stuff in the street, good night! In the end the point of his knife went through without a sound, opening a peep-hole. The hotel lay in front of him.

He could look over the wall. The sun-baked yard was empty, but a couple of narrow slits had been opened in the wooden gates, and he guessed that there were watchers behind them. There were two sleepy sentries squatting inside the door out of the sun, and the big room seemed to be crowded with men. He couldn't distinguish individuals. Upstairs there was a sentry on the little balcony. This one would command a stretch of the Avenida. There were some men in the room behind him; no women in sight; no machine gun.

Leggy opened another peep-hole in the side wall near the front, and looked down on the back of a second barricade across the Avenida beyond the lane, with half a dozen men on guard. Over their heads the palm thatch had been removed. The barricade in the side lane he could not see; there was a building between.

He returned to his first hole. If only Manoel would come out on the balcony I could end the war with a single shot! he thought. He widened the hole so that he could shoot through it. But Manoel never appeared. He knew better. And time was passing. Leggy was forced to go. I'll come back here, he said to himself.

The next problem was how to cross the end of the Avenida. The men at the barricade had their backs to him, the sentry on the balcony was also looking the other way. Leggy wouldn't be exposed to them more than five seconds before gaining the end wall. But the Indians across the clearing could see him until he turned the back of the hotel. Well, they were a good way off. It had to be chanced. He flitted across as silently as a shadow. No alarm raised.

BEHIND the hotel he was covered by trees growing along the bank. The building overhung the bank somewhat, and the windows on this side were above his head. In front of him the verandas attached to the bedrooms jutted out still further over the bank.

Ducking under the veranda, he got a nasty blow. The ladder that he had hidden there was gone! Some scout had discovered it. The thought of that ladder had always been in the back of his mind as a last resort. He stared blankly at the spot where it had lain.

Coming out from under the veranda, there was no cover except a rank growth of weeds. The main body of Manoel's men was billeted inside the theater. He could hear their chatter. He snaked on inch by inch through the weeds. Occasionally a

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pair of caboclos came over the creaking bridge bearing a palm log on their shoulders. Just beyond the bridge Manoel had erected another barricade. Four men were guarding it. Nearer Leggy grew an immense, low-spreading zamang tree. From its branches hung the strands of bijuco or bush-rope that supported this side of the bridge.

Leggy considered the bridge. It was an important link in Manoel's communications, and to destroy it would be something accomplished. Easy enough to destroy it. The question was getting away after. There were four men at the barricade. Two were sitting, two standing, keeping one eye down the creek while they talked with their comrades. Not expecting danger from the other side, they never looked towards the spot where Leggy lay. The branches of the big tree reached out beyond the barricade. Naturally, if the bridge crashed, the men would run back to look.

Leggy crept up to the tree, keeping its huge bole between him and the men. He gained the lowermost branch, and was swallowed up in the thick foliage. Working out on the thick horizontal branch which supported the bridge, he tackled the strands of bijuco with his knife, and cut them almost through, one after another, working back toward the trunk. As he finished the job, he saw a pair of caboclos come out of the jungle, bearing a log, and made haste to creep out on the branch over the barricade. He knew when the log-bearers set foot to the bridge by the creaking. They had about seventy-five feet to go. He waited with a fast beating heart.

There was a crash of splintering bamboot behind him; frightened yells. He waited for no more. Running out along the branch as far as it would support him, he dropped to the ground and set off running along the bank at top speed. In a moment he was seen; shouts were raised behind him, a bullet sang past. He ran on, zigzagging, not greatly concerned about the bullets, for the bank rounded out of sight just ahead.

After he turned the bend, two men ran into view a hundred yards ahead, and levelled their guns. Leggy measured the back of the house at his left, and clawed his way to the roof with the aid of a window. He scrambled to the front, and let himself down on the poles supporting the thatch over the Avenida. The whole structure came down with him into the street. He was unhurt and started running again.

But the men in front found a way through, and still cut him off, nearer now. He ran back to an opening on the other side, and darted through between two buildings hoping to lose himself amongst the huddle of shacks on the other side. This whole end of camp was ringing with yells and shots. He caught glimpses of them closing in on three sides. There was only one thing to do: he plunged into the gully. The thorns tore his rags to ribbons and gouged his flesh—but he was safe. His pursuers stood at the edge of the gully, firing down into it blindly.

He crossed the path he had cut an hour before, and turned into it thankfully. A few minutes later he flung himself down on the veranda of Blacktower's house panting. The boss, hearing him, came out.

"So you're back!" he said sourly.

Leggy thought: Yes, damn you! He said: "I had to cut a way through the scrub in the gully. You'll have to watch it now or they'll creep through."

CHAPTER XVI.

ATTACK.

BLACKTOWER'S army was assembled on the plaza under the blazing sun. The trench was completed. A hundred men had been picked for an attacking party, divided into ten squads, each under command of a member of the committee. The less warlike spirits were to be left to guard the base. With the prospect of a fight ahead, the seringueiros didn't feel the heat. They stamped in the dust and fingered their rifles in anticipation. Their teeth gleamed in their hairy faces. The Chinese circulated amongst them with buckets of iced rum and water.

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Leggy had not yet received an assignment. He stood close behind Blacktower listening to his final dispositions. "I take six squads and approach the theater from along the creek bank, Hamill's squad in advance. If we're attacked from the backs of the houses, we can drop down the bank.

"Beasley with the other four squads will make his way along the path cut by Leggy in the bottom of the gully. He must cut his way a hundred yards further than Leggy went in order to get by the post on that side without being seen. Don't fool with the Indians at the edge of the jungle. They won't attack men with firearms. Occupy the roof and the interior of Gonzales' place, entering by the rear, also the adjoining house on the right. The point is, not to let the people in the hotel suspect your presence across the road until I give the word to fire. Surprise is everything. My whistle will give you the signal. Not a shot until you hear the whistle." Blacktower blew softly on the whistle to familiarize everybody with the sound.

"I leave MacGregor in command of the base," he went on. "Keep men in the trench at all times, and let others patrol the shore. The chief danger is from the water. I don't know what boats the caboclos may have got together. In case anything comes up that you can't handle, you can summon help by blowing the steamboat whistle. But you are not to call us back unless it is necessary."

Blacktower now mounted a box so that all could see him. "Men," he said, "we're going out to get a murderer who has gathered a mob of dirty caboclos around him for protection. You know what the caboclos are. They can't stand against men. It's true they have a machine gun. That gives them an advantage. But remember, a machine gun can't be in but one place at once. If we keep it occupied by making a feint at one door, we can walk in by the other. I look for this whole war to be over in an hour.

"But we must absolutely act together. Organization is the white man's strength. That's why I have divided you into squads, and given each squad a leader. I can't keep in touch with all of you, but I can with the ten leaders. I'll see that they get my orders, and I look to you to obey the orders they give you. Stick to your leader! Remember, the caboclos outnumber us, and if we fall apart, you'll have to submit to the everlasting disgrace of being licked by a parcel of breeds!

"One thing more. Leave the liquor alone until . . ."

That was all Leggy heard of Blacktower's speech. At his feet he saw a broken arrow ground into the dust. Nobody had seen it fall. No one knew how long it had lain there. Dozens of men must have stepped on it or over it. He picked it up. A piece of paper was wound around the shaft. Detaching it, Leggy read:

Blacktower:

It was you started this trouble. I am only fighting for what is mine. I was married to La Rosadora to-day by Juize Cavados. A Juize is authorized to marry people, so this marriage is legal and binding. I wanted to wait awhile for decency, but you forced me to this. So there is nothing more for you to fight about. La Rosadora is my wife. You better send your seringueiros home or the Avenida will run with blood.

Manoel Carvalho.

Underneath was written:

I was married to Manoel with my full consent. Nobody forced me to do it.

La Rosadora.

Leggy thought he had steeled himself to bear anything. But this unexpected blow out of the dust unnerved him. It was a lie, of course. Fay *had* been forced to sign it. The handwriting was hers all right. Such a marriage meant nothing, for Fay was married to him. But even a form of marriage, a mock marriage! Fay in the arms of that swine!

He suddenly realized that Blacktower had stepped down from his box and was

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barking at him. "What have you got there?" Leggy handed it over.

"This is addressed to me! What are you doing with it?"

"It was wrapped around this arrow," said Leggy. "There was nothing on the outside to tell to whom it was sent."

Blacktower read it, and his face turned blackish like a man with apoplexy. The veins in his forehead seemed to be about to burst. He recovered himself with an effort.

"A clumsy forgery!" he said thickly. "It means nothing."

BLACKTOWER knew that it was Fay's hand because he had had several notes from her. Leggy said nothing.

"Anyhow, it makes no difference," said Blacktower. "We want Manoel for murder!" He raised his voice. "Forward, men!" To Leggy he said: "You go with Hamill's squad. Say nothing about this."

The disorderly mob straggled along the creek bank, hawking, spitting, cursing, talking big. The tall spare figure of Blacktower strode ahead, gun under his arm. A seringueiro yelled:

"Hey, boss! That tile of yours will make an elegant target!"

"That's all right," said Blacktower coolly. "It's my every day hat and I'm not going to take it off for any amount of caboclos!"

Progress was slow because the way was littered with rubbish thrown out of the backs of the houses. Blacktower put George in front of him to kick the stuff down the bank. The Hawaiian boy's skin was gray with terror. When he hesitated, Blacktower kicked him.

Most of the trees along the bank had been cut down, and there was little cover on the creek side. The creek was about two hundred yards wide at its mouth. An occasional shot came over from the other side, but they disregarded it, knowing that most of the caboclos were handling high powered guns for the first time in their lives.

In front of Leggy walked the trim, well-knit Hamill in his neatly pressed black suit, starched collar and cuffs, patent leather shoes, just as he presided over the roulette table every night. It was the only sort of clothes he had. When space permitted, he walked beside Blacktower. These two hated each other. Self-interest kept them together.

As they neared the bend that would bring Manoel's barricade into view, Blacktower turned, and held up his hand to halt the main body. To Hamill he said: "Go ahead! You know what you have to do."

The twelve men, instinctively taking their guns in both hands, went forward. "Now don't shoot each other!" growled Blacktower. To the man behind he said: "Quiet now, and take cover! The fun is beginning."

The broken bridge gradually edged into view, the big tree, the barricade with the corner of the theater building behind it. A yell of excitement went up from the barricade and the caboclos' guns popped. The seringueiros spread out, and answered. Hamill said:

"You want to act scared and foolish."

He flung himself down and they followed suit; fired; got up and running a few steps, flung themselves down again. The caboclos' guns answered. No damage was done on either side. The seringueiros were laughing.

"Iron out that grin!" ordered Hamill. "Or what's the use?"

The fire from behind the barricade ceased. "Gone to tell their friends," muttered Hamill. "Lie where you are until they come back."

SILENCE. Some of the men lit cigarettes. "Good comedy," said one. "Just wait until Martin comes," answered his mate.

A tremendous yelling arose, as the caboclos poured out of the theater. A row of heads appeared over the barricade. The seringueiros fired; the caboclos answered. Seeing how few were in the attacking party, the bolder men on Manoel's side began to creep around the barricade, taking cover under the edge of the bank, and firing as they came.

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Hamill said: "Run forward once more and fire. Then make out to be wavering. You," he added to Penrose, "start running back, and I'll knock you down."

The seringueiros entered into this by-play with zest; improved on Hamill's instructions. It worked. With a yell of triumph, the whole mob of caboclos came pouring over the barricade; crouched; fired, ran forward a few steps.

"Now give ground," said Hamill. "Slowly! Slowly! Or they'll suspect something! Lead 'em on! There's time yet."

The seringueiros with much pantomime of panic, retreated slowly; fired half-heartedly, retreated again. Suddenly the caboclos broke into a charge.

"Now beat it!" said Hamill. "Not too fast. They can't fire when they're running. Let them catch up a little. Run like hell when you get around the bend!"

The men obeyed. Some made believe to fall, and scrambled up, looking behind them as if frenzied with terror. Leggy ran with the rest.

Around the bend Blacktower and his men were waiting between the empty houses, behind the windows, lying along the edge of the roofs. The twelve ran past them. In a moment or two came the caboclos yelling like demons. They had made the white men run! Blacktower let them get well past, then the whistle sounded like a silver thread amidst the yelling, and the fifty guns spoke. The range was between ten and twenty feet.

Hamill's men turned around and poured in their fire. It was a weird sight. The caboclos leaped crazily; twisted, flung up their arms like puppets on wires; dropped limply. The yells of triumph merged into the inhuman screeching of wounded men. It seemed as if every one of them must be killed, but it was not so. The casualties were not above forty. They rolled over the edge of the bank, or pitched down headlong. Some ran through mud and water straight across the creek; the greater number went back the way they had come. A part of them had never rounded the bend.

The seringueiros poured out of their hiding places. "After them! After them!" Blacktower was shouting, waving his gun above his head. The whole mob set out along the edge of the bank. It was their turn to yell now. Hamill's men joined them. They were now the rear guard. One of the seringueiros started collecting the guns of the fallen.

"Drop it!" ordered Hamill. "Plenty of time later!"

Another bearded pioneer in a ten-gallon black hat dropped to his knees and stabbed a caboclo in whom he thought he saw signs of life. "Not taking any chances of getting it in the back!" he growled. He went on to another. They left him stabbing.

THEY ran on the way they had first gone, jumping over the dead caboclos. Beyond the barricade the terrified flock divided. The greater part ran down the bank and across the creek. The other end of the bridge had not been cut and it was possible to cross by the fallen structure, though a foot of water flowed over the middle of it. Others turned left and hid among the buildings.

Blacktower halted the chase at the barricade. Everything had become strangely quiet. Leggy and others looked over the top. Not a soul in sight. The entrance to the theater yawned wide, for the screen inside had been smashed down. The building looked deserted, but no one was anxious to go see. The machine gun commanded the whole interior.

Blacktower glanced at his watch. "That was so damn quick," he said, "I don't suppose Beasley is in position yet." He looked at Leggy. "Go and see what they're doing in the Avenida."

Leggy got a couple of men to boost him up on the roof of the building at their right, and crept forward to look down into the Avenida. In two minutes he was back.

"All clear," he said. "Both the other barricades have been abandoned."

"Find Beasley," said Blacktower, "and tell him to get a move on. As soon as he is in position to keep up a sustained fire on the hotel, give me two pistol shots and wait

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for the sound of the whistle. Meanwhile we'll be mopping up on this side."

"Boss," said Leggy, "if you held the outside of the two barricades it would keep them from working around behind us. Manoel still has a crowd of men in the hotel."

"When I want your advice, I'll ask for it," said Blacktower with a hard look. Just the same, Leggy noticed that he split one of the squads to man the barricades.

Leggy made his way to the Avenida between two buildings, took a slant up and down that empty thoroughfare, and ran across. He was seen from the hotel and fired at, but by that time he was over. Making a detour amongst the shacks, he came up behind Jao Gonzales' place. Beasley's party was not in sight.

Climbing to the roof, he went to his loophole in the front parapet. In the hotel everything looked much the same. A crowd of men faintly visible through the windows of the lower floor; a few men in the big room upstairs; sentries inside the door. The same man was squatting on the little balcony with the barrel of his gun resting on the rail—probably the best marksman on their side. No women visible; no signs of excitement. Apparently they did not yet know how seriously they had been defeated.

Leggy waited, hoping that Manoel might appear at one of the windows. But he did not. In a quarter of an hour or so the heads of the first seringueiros of Dan Beasley's party popped up over the back of the roof. They came creeping to his side.

"Here already?" said one. "Boy! but you're swift!"

"Where you been?" retorted Leggy.

He slipped down at the back to see Beasley. The big man was unscrewing the hinges of the back door on Gonzales' place to let his men inside. A pleasant smell was wafted out. The front of the shop was boarded up. Rows of bottles still stood along the shelves, but these were mostly for show. The real stuff, two kegs of rum, rested, one on each end of the bar. The seringueiros looked at it longingly.

"If any man takes a drink I'll bean him!" growled Dan. "Afterwards you can have all you want."

LEGGY told Beasley what had happened. "Sure!" he snarled. "Blacktower would take the showy stuff and leave me do the sweating!" Dan was too fat to go campaigning. Already he was spent and sore.

"There's nobody in the street in front," Leggy went on. "You had better occupy the corner house instead of the one to the right, because it has a flat roof. The barricade in the lane alongside is now held by our men. Warn every man with a gun to watch out for the women in the hotel."

Dan merely grunted ill-temperedly.

He allowed Leggy to go around and see that every man was in place; lined up under the parapets of the roofs, and waiting under cover below. In the corner building the seringueiros stretched out on the floor of the front room, ready to rise up and fire through the windows. In the rum-shop they slyly whittled out the cracks between the shutters to give them room to shoot through. The men above were directed to fire into the ground floor windows of the hotel, and vice versa. Two men were chosen from each squad and held in reserve behind Gonzales, with a long log that the party had brought. These, when the command was given, were to run through to the right of the house, and smash in the hotel gate.

When all was ready, Leggy sent a man with instructions to proceed a hundred yards to the left and fire the pistol. He didn't want to alarm the hotel prematurely. Leggy himself climbed back to his original peep-hole in the front parapet and waited.

Across the way, all looked peaceful. The dingy hotel seemed to be sleeping in the heat. The rags of mosquito netting hung motionless in the windows. High against the hot, white sky beyond, the vultures were circling. It was feast day for them. The marksman on the balcony lit a cigarette. His last.

The pistol was discharged twice. The marksman on the balcony started up a

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little, raised his gun, peered down the Avenida. The silvery keening of Blacktower's whistle sounded in the stillness, and hell broke loose. Nearly forty guns poured their fire into the hotel. The sound rose and broke in waves as the men fired.

For so much power the effect was small. There was no reply from across the way. The man on the balcony settled quietly back and let go his gun. He was dead ten times over. One of the sentries sprawled out across the door-sill; the other escaped inside. The figures seen through the windows vanished. They had dropped to the floor. The casualties could not have been high, because no sound came across. A muffled screaming of women could be heard, but they were cries of fright, not pain.

Since they had nothing to shoot at, the seringueiros slackened fire; stopped. In spite of orders several stood up to get a better view. A single gun barked from across the way, and a fellow known as Turtle toppled over backwards beside Leggy with a little hole in his forehead. Everybody ducked then. Through his peep-hole Leggy searched the front of the hotel, yard by yard. He saw the top of a head; a gun barrel. It disappeared quickly.

"He's on the roof, fellows. Over the fourth window counting from the right."

A man near him growled to his mate: "You're the best shot, sojer. I'll stand up and wave, and you get him when he takes aim at me."

They got him.

On the roof of the next house they were popping up and down and firing. This was getting nowhere. Leggy slipped down at the back to see Dan Beasley.

"They're willing to let us keep this up as long as we like."

"What can we do?"

"Keep up a steady fire, and under cover of it let the boys break down the gate."

THE necessary orders were sent next door, and Leggy went back. He fired his gun for a signal, and once more the rattle of firing rolled up and broke in waves of sound. This time the men had been instructed to keep on firing until the fellows with the battering-ram got back under cover.

They started across the street with their log. Two puffs of smoke issued from the gate, the two leading men collapsed, their comrades fell over them, the blow failed. As soon as they had fired once, the two caboclos behind the gate scuttled for the house. They were shot down as they reached the door.

The men with the log could not see this. The four survivors gamely retired across the road, reformed, and came charging back. Under the first blow the gate flew in. They dropped the log, snatched up their wounded comrades, under the arms, and ran back for cover.

A lull followed. The gate stood open; the yard was empty except for three dead men. No head appeared at any window; a dead man's rifle barrel stuck up over the roof. Leggy hustled down into the rum-shop, Dan Beasley was cursing and biting his fingers, at a loss how to act. The seringueiros were itching to be out and across the street.

"Wait a minute!" said Leggy, warningly.

There was a quality in his voice that they respected. They lowered their guns. Leggy put his eye to a loophole.

Presently a leg stuck out of the middle window of the second story, and kicked the dead marksman out of the way. The muzzle of the machine gun was thrust forward. A steel shield protected the gunner.

"Back out of range!" cried Leggy.

The gun opened its vicious chatter. A storm of bullets tore through the wooden shutters and buried themselves in the floor. The seringueiros were out of harm's way at the back. The hail of bullets passed across the front and on next door like feet running away. The gun was elevated, and they came back, rattling against the 'dobe parapets above. A shower of fragments fell into the street. Back across the shutter, blowing in little pieces of wood, and returning along the roofs. Leggy wondered what Blacktower was doing.

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Suddenly the gun ceased firing. Leggy ran forward to the shutters. "The gun is gone, boys!" he cried. "Now's the time! Come on!"

They threw up the bars, and let the shutters fall in the street. They ran over them cheering, heading for the gate. Men were climbing from the windows next door; dropping from the parapets of both houses. They dashed across the yard—only a shot or two came from the windows above; jammed in the doorway in their eagerness; spread out inside. The big room was empty. Open windows at the back showed which way the caboclos had gone. One or two of them could still be seen splashing across the creek.

The machine gun opened fire somewhere inside the house, roaring. The bullets rang against an iron surface. Looking off to the left, Leggy saw a strange sight. The round table tops were advancing one after another around the bend in the corridor. No human agency was visible, only the round disks one after another, overlapping and ranging themselves in an oblique barricade across the corridor. Like some kind of crazy dance on the stage. Behind Leggy the seringueiros roared with laughter. Before the first tier was completed, tables appeared higher up and a second tier began to drop into place. The bullets splashed harmlessly against the iron.

LEGGY saw that it would not be necessary to build the tables all the way across the corridor. Owing to the restricted position of the gun at the head of the stairs, it could only shoot straight down, and a foot or two to one side. It could not be shoved forward through the door above without exposing the gunner to a flanking fire. He held the stairs, that was all. The range of the gun was exactly marked out by the bullet holes in the floor.

Leggy could not wait for the barricade to be completed. There were only a few feet exposed. He watched for the gun to move away from the spot and sped past it, and down the corridor. Once behind the barricade he saw the crouching seringueiros advancing with still more tables. Planks laid across the legs of the first tier supported the legs of the second tier. Leggy's objective was the last door in the corridor. He flung it open. The room was empty.

As he turned away from the door, Blacktower was entering from the theater. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

"This was La Rosadora's room," said Leggy.

"Well?"

"She's not there. They have taken the women upstairs."

When the shield was completed past the danger zone, the gun ceased firing. Blacktower went through to the big room and shook hands with Dan Beasley.

"Well, we got 'em sewed up!" said Beasley grinning.

"How many are there upstairs?" asked Blacktower.

"We could see about twenty," said Beasley. "Maybe more."

The room became jammed with men. "Find any rum?" they were all asking each other. Blacktower scowled.

"Get back into the theater, men!" he commanded. "You've got room in there. Take a rest, and I'll have your supper fetched from the base."

"We want rum!" they cried.

"All right, I'll fetch it for you."

"Have we got to stay in the theater?" demanded a voice from the back. "Why can't we go out and mop 'em up!"

"Your job's not done yet," said Blacktower. "As soon as we get our hands on that skunk and liberate the women, you can do as you please."

They filed out grumbling. One of the last to go was an ill-favored ruffian with red-rimmed eyes and lips drooling tobacco juice. He pointed upstairs.

"How about smoking 'em out, Gov'nor? Build little fire down here and toast 'em."

"Go into the theater, and wait for orders."

"All right! All right! No offense!" He shuffled away.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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Beginner's Luck

By ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART

Far out in the gold-claim country, he thought no smart dick could get him for this "sweet set-up"—then Majestic Mountain began to slide

TWO of the seventeen pack mules came uncorked and began kicking and biting midway along the trough trail zig-zagging irregularly across the snowy face of Majestic Slide. Above, eight hundred feet, blue shadows were tucked under the overhanging comb built out by blizzards that had smoked across ragged mountain skylines. Little gobs of hard-chilled snow, dislodged by the fighting jacks, danced and skittered down a steep

"She's runnin'," wailed Bowden

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thousand feet to where the snout of the slide rooted into a tangle of mashed trees, crushed rocks and old débris carried to the bottom when the slide had run in years past.

For seconds the two jacks teetered on the edge of whatever Eternity may hold for a pack mule. With faces suddenly ashen, packers floundered along the upside of the trail, trying to get the train unsnarled and quieted.

If panniers had been full, packs lashed high, it would have been mules, maybe men, over the rim of the hard-packed channel in the snow, and death at the foot of the slide. But they were coming down with saddles empty after delivering powder, steel, caps and grub to old man Bowden's place in Apex Basin.

At the edge of the slide, where black granite dikes upthrust, Kenneth Gormley watched; and forgot to breathe. In his twenty-seven years of city life, Gormley never had seen men leap thus to grapple bare-handed with raw danger. A mule got one foot over the edge. A man jumped to throw his weight against the half-lost mule. Ragged shreds of a second ripped away as they thrashed there, on the lip of frozen snow.

A mule brayed derisively, the one half-over the brink floundered back, the train began to move, and a packer swore with all his might and soul. Saddle tackle jingled, snow creaked under hoofs, chill serenity swept in where death had hovered.

Old man Bowden, who stood on the granite ledge beside Gormley, relaxed slightly and his full-whiskered jaws resumed their slow cadence as he mauled a cud of tobacco.

"Close," breathed Gormley. He had been a drygoods clerk before loss of job and lure of gold had brought him into the hills.

Bowden's little blue eyes squinted, his radish nose wriggled into a network of fine wrinkles, and he nodded. "Yep," he agreed in his clear, cheery voice, "yep, clost. Shows somewhat the risks men'll take when gold's involved. Lucky this is the last supplies we'll need packed up afore the slide runs."

Cleghorn came from beyond the squat cabin. He was the third member of this mixed trio that had clung here, mining in Apex Basin through a winter now howling toward melting spring. He was a city man too; swart, blue-jawed, with bristly black hair crowding down on his forehead which rested on massive black brows. Gormley had the slenderness of youth; Cleghorn, no older, was heavy-limbed.

"You keep piping off about that slide running," remarked Cleghorn, his voice filled with irritation and argument. "Sounds like you're trying to talk it into doing its stuff."

"When them jacks got fightin' I thought maybe it'd start the slide this very minute," said Bowden, spitting brown and delicately wiping stained, silvered whiskers away from hidden lips. "Sun's gettin' hotter each day, she's ripe to cut loose, an' when one part of that snow field shears, the whole shootin'-match'll run. She's a sight. Hope we see it."

"And how," observed Cleghorn. He turned to look at the upper section of the slide, an almost vertical mass of snow. "Jeest, what a one way ride that would be," he remarked in his slurred, soft-nasal way. He looked suddenly at the other two, eyes wide. Then away, quickly.

The quest for gold was the common bond between the three. Years back Bowden had come into the hills seeking a fortune. Seasons had rolled while he gophered in the Basin. The previous summer, Gormley had left his girl-wife with her parents, and guided by blind hope and a fist full of government bulletins, had launched desperately into one-man placering. Bowden had found him on Sowbelly Creek and out of pity had taken Gormley into partnership. Cleghorn, who used that name as readily as he did a dozen others, had been hiding from enemies of his own stripe when he had met and talked with old Bowden down in town. The gangster had become a third partner because Bowden was desperately seeking money for

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winter supplies, and Cleghorn had money. Gold beckoned to this third man as it had to the other two.

"I DON'T want to be in that cabin when it slides," said Gormley.

"I've told you," Bowden assured him, "she'll not touch our cabin. That porphyry dike up there—that's the key. Got to shear away there afore it'll start in other sections abbve us. Whole upper end of the snow field rests against that rock wall. Until the lower half of that dike's plumb wrecked, no snow'll touch the cabin. I've watched; it's wearin' that fin of rock a little each year. Slide comes a little closer each time, but I'll be dead afore enough of that porphyry's gone to let snow smash the cabin."

"You'll be dead if it does," Cleghorn laughed shortly and walked hurriedly up slope past the crouching hut that seemed to cringe and huddle down as though it would hide from the dazzling presence of the slide.

"Just a few more nasty cracks out of that guy," said Gormley, "and I'll tangle with him again. He's getting hard to live with."

"Stummick," said Bowden, unruffled. "I'll feed more prunes. An' he's mountain-sick, because he ain't learned to live with the big hills. He's all hungry to hear city racket an' jazz."

"It was a mistake to bring him up here," declared Gormley. "He's a rat, and a gangster, and dangerous to have around."

"Mebby," agreed Bowden. "But he had money an' we were without grub. We needed what help he'd give us."

Gormley scowled up toward the point where Cleghorn was puttering around his snow-bound claim. Twice in the last ten days Gormley had started for Cleghorn, fists doubled, but Bowden had made peace. "I'm uneasy," said Gormley finally. "That bird's got some sort of hell stewing inside him. If he didn't have those two automatics strapped to him all the time, I'd make it my job to kick him down the trail. I'm not going to let him ride me any more."

"You'll learn patience if you live in these hills long enough," soothed Bowden. The old sourdough squinted up to where a veil of blown snow had turned to fire in the shafts of sundown lights. "Lord, ain't she beautiful!" he whispered. "I never seem tired of watchin' that mountain an' that snow slide. Guess maybe part of my religion's sorta based on the mountains, an' the seasons, an' things like that. You can't fight 'em; no man can. But you can live with 'em an' they take care of you. Well, let's get food hotted up 'fore it gets dark."

Cleghorn came down and entered the cabin as Bowden dumped golden biscuits onto a tin dish.

"Steak tonight," said Gormley. "Steak and gravy and hot biscuits. Boy! Bowden makes gravy almost good as my wife can."

"Some jane, your wife," said Cleghorn.

"I told you not to make remarks about her again," flamed Gormley.

"You're tellin' me," jeered Cleghorn. He stood grinning derisively at Gormley. "What you expect, huh? All I hear around here is about her cooking from you, and about that lousy snow slide from Bowden. If you was radios I'd tune you both out. Yeah—tune you out." He grinned thinly, his beady eyes looking at one, then the other.

Bowden shrugged and put a pitch knot in the stove. Men got this way during long winters at mining camps. Bowden knew. They ate then, in silence, until Gormley spoke.

"Dynamite they packed up today ought to get us somewhere," he said.

"Month before we get any more powder," said Bowden. "Ought to open the breast of ore in that time."

"THAT'S something more I've heard all I want to hear about," Cleghorn said crustily.

"First time you heard about that lode

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you were in a sweat to grubstake Bowden and me for your third share," flared Gormley.

"Sez you," sneered Cleghorn.

"Yeah, sez me; and if we'd known you like we do now, we'd lived on sowbelly and snowballs before you'd heard about the lost lode."

"Bowden's lost it, ain't he? You needed grub money, didn't you? Anyone who finds that lode, they've got a right to it, ain't they? Think you're going to chisel on me, Gormley, that it? Get me so sore I'll go down the trail? I'm warning you, don't lay a finger on me."

"Then ditch that grouch. I've listened to enough of it."

"Shut up, both of you," ordered Bowden quietly. "That big vein's near here, somewhere. I've traced the fault where I lost it in nineteen four, an' it's bound to outcrop about where our claims are. The stringer I'm followin' may lead right into it. When we find it there'll be enough for all."

"Split three ways, I suppose," jeered Cleghorn.

"Customary, an' we agreed to it," replied Bowden, unruffled.

"And how you'd share it," ventured Cleghorn.

"Oh, dry up," protested Gormley. "Cut the razzing. We've not found the vein yet."

"When you've lived long as I have in this country it won't get your nerves like this." Bowden nodded his shaggy head at the two. "You've got to be able to live with mountains, peaceable."

"I hope someone shoots me if I stick here long as you have," said Cleghorn and turned to sopping up gravy with a broken biscuit. "I'd go nuts, like you."

For a wordless moment, the sucking breath of the sheet-iron stove, the soft roar of a wind shuttling through twisty spruce of timberline forests, the clatter of a rock, split by frost from the farther side of the cirque, and Bowden smacking his lips over tough, grass-fed steak, the last fresh meat for days,—these sounds only. Bowden got up, removed dishes mottled with residue gravy, set enamelware saucers filled with stewed fruit in front of them.

"Prunes? Hell!" Cleghorn shoved them from him contemptuously. He scowled, got up, rummaged in the supplies, pulled out a fresh carton of cigarettes, broke a package, lit one, stuffed the packet in his shirt pocket, lounged in his tilted chair.

"What starts the slide, Bowden?" asked Gormley.

Cleghorn turned on Gormley, scowled, started to protest, then set his lips in a thin line.

"Anything might start it," said the old miner, ignoring, if he knew, the fact that Gormley had asked the question to further irritate Cleghorn. "Why, one year she went out, slewed, freakish-like, to catch Joe Linke an' Turner Macey who was workin' a bond an' lease on the old Jayhawk 'crost the gulch, an' there was a report that someone hollered too loud, or that it was the wind which blew terrible that night. Caught those two fellers in their bunks. I was with the party from the Little Sue, over the next gulch, that come to dig 'em out. Froze plumb solid, they was, an' we had to use picks to pry 'em out of the snow."

"Shut up!" blared Cleghorn, jumping to his feet. "Shut that dam' blab of yours. You talk nothing but that lost vein and that snow slide, and these lousy mountains. Lay off—lay off, I tell you—if you don't want to get hurt." He flung out of the cabin.

"That gorilla would kill a man for a few hundred bucks and he's all hopped up with the idea of gold," said Gormley. "I tell you, Bowden, he's really dangerous. It can't go on like this!"

"Mebby that's right," agreed Bowden. "He's worse tonight than usual."

GORMLEY moved to help the old miner as dishes were washed. They did not talk much. The growing menace of Cleghorn's attitude was too

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heavy. Trustful old Bowden thought regretfully of the necessity that had forced him to accept the gangster; Gormley thought bitterly of tragic news that might go to his wife if the tension broke into actual clash. Methodically, Bowden scalded each plate. Finally Gormley spread the sugar sack wiping towel on a wire above the stove and turned to the bunks.

"He's been after me to change bunks with him," remarked Gormley. "Maybe it'll help matters a little if I give him mine and I take his." He reached for blankets just as Cleghorn came, and stood, belligerently, in the door.

"Get away from that bunk," said Cleghorn fiercely. His hand made a suggestive move toward a shoulder holster, then drew back.

"Now don't boil over," admonished Gormley. "All I was trying to do was promote peace and change our bunks, like you've been asking for the last two weeks. So keep your shirt on and keep your hand from that gun. If you want to put the fear in me,—I don't scare!"

"Oh, changing the bunks," said Cleghorn, relaxing a little. "Oke, but I'll move my own stuff, see? Don't go messing with my plunder, get me?" Cleghorn picked up blankets and knots of belongings, bundled them, stacked them near the outer bunk. "Now move your stuff in where mine was and I'll put mine in this bunk."

Gormley pulled his bed and threw it together on the mattress Cleghorn had vacated.

Bowden stepped out the door and Gormley followed while Cleghorn hastily started building his bed in the bunk nearest the door.

"We've got to find a way to get rid of that bird," said Gormley as he and Bowden walked away from the cabin, and stood, looking up to the white robe of the mountain. "He's going gangster on us. There's only one way to handle that sort of a snake. Get rid of 'em—some way."

"He's just extra wormy because the pack train come up an' that reminded him of the lower country," suggested Bowden.

They both stood, gazing up at the gigantic slab of snow that seemed to hang over them.

"Injuns must have found a lot of God in these mountains before we whites come tearin' 'em up," said Bowden softly. "Sometimes I think of that mountain an' the slide as a sort of dwellin' place for mountain spirits. Winds boomin' over the top are invisible choirs of some kind. We hear only wind sounds, but maybe it's music we don't understand. Like Cleghorn says, maybe the mountain's got me sort of off my base. Maybe. Don't know. But I can live in these mountains, an' with 'em. That's really what I hold against Cleghorn; he can't seem to live with 'em. But you can."

"I could—with her here," said Gormley.

"Thinkin' about the wife?" suggested Bowden.

"Yes. Cleghorn acting so wild, I've wondered what would happen to her if something happened to me. But I always think of her when I'm out here, after dark. Gives me a feeling—oh, I don't know—. Sounds sappy. Maybe it is—but I've stood in cathedrals sometimes and had this feeling, like there was some Presence near. Same as you feel, Bowden, only I can't say it right. Sort of like us little humans are carried along in some giant Hand—oh, I don't know,—but Cleghorn's rowing around seems awful small when you get out here and the timberline winds blow around you, and the stars seem just up there where you could brush 'em from the sky with a long broom."

"Sure," said Bowden. "Sure. I know."

The hollow sigh of a wind dragged high over the crags. Another rock bounded down, setting little echoes of its crash and rumbling, exploding throughout the cirque. A wind came to tug at them with playful, unseen hands. Blue black sky, jet cliffs of rock, and the ghostly mass of white all vividly contrasted with the mellow square of barn-sash window in the cabin; a pigmy beacon in the vast place.

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"Maybe it ain't prunes," said Bowden suddenly. "Maybe he's got something a lot worse crosswise some're in his soul. I'm a mite uneasy tonight for some reason. Mountain's talkin' to me."

HE carefully tossed away a wad of tobacco and went into the cabin. Gormley stood, minutes, looking up to the castellated rim of Majestic Mountain, to the crest of that awesome snow field. Then he turned, entered the cabin, found Cleghorn had appropriated all the newspapers and was reading them by light of the bracket lamp. Bowden had gone directly to bed and was beginning to snuffle softly, his face jammed against blanket folds. Gormley slouched into his new bunk, rolled over, slept.

Cleghorn waited, reading and watching. He was trembling when he blew out the light softly, went through the motions of slipping into his own bunk, bunched the covers to simulate someone huddled on the far side, then walked in stocking feet to the door, and slid out. He slipped on boots and walked cautiously. At the old tunnel where Bowden had stored the dynamite, he shouldered a case and started laboriously up the slope toward the place where the porphyry dike keyed the snow mass. He stopped to blow; looked back on the shadowy cabin.

"Saps!" he breathed. "Saps! Yeah, they'd share it three ways. Yes they would!"

He was steaming under heavy wool clothing when he reached the dike. He knew the place he would set this powder; a crack about half the way up this rock fin. He had selected the spot today. Smart. To think of using the slide instead of a rod. Careful guy; that was Cleghorn. An ordinary punk would have gone yelling down the slope minute he'd found yellow gold. Share big time stuff like this—aw, hell, why?

No smart dick could lay a finger on him for this. No rods with finger prints on them, no scored marks on bullets that investigators could pick out of a stiff. Not a thing to trip him. Not a chance—*not a chance!* Old Bowden himself had planned this; after he'd talked, anyone could see how the slide would run if that piece of rock was blown out of the way. Snow, right into the cabin. Sweet; a very sweet set-up.

Cleghorn grinned in his twisted way, at the snow slide.

"My old pal," he whispered. "What a swell piece of scenery you turned out to be."

Cleghorn turned hurriedly and made a second trip. A third; and he was moving faster; sweating. Before the last climb up to the porphyry, he tiptoed to the cabin. All was quiet. With extreme caution he touched the heavy hasp lightly, seated it over the stout staple, slipped the tongue of the heavy, unlocked padlock in the staple. The one window would give no exit even if they awakened. Old man Bowden had taken care of that years back; when he put heavy bars over it to keep thieves out; now those bars would keep Bowden and Gormley inside.

Cleghorn was a careful guy and he had thought this all out, even to leaving the door unlocked until the last trip. If they'd awakened then, before he was ready, they'd not suspected anything except that he was outside, smoking, or prowling. Slick. Just slick.

AT the porphyry he thrust dynamite into the crevasse in the rock. In the last stick he punched holes and seated two fuses fitted with caps. He had seen Bowden fit caps to fuses. Smart; to have two. Only a bozo who figured out everything would have thought of that.

He broke the first match; the second was puffed out by the wind.

"I'll show you," Cleghorn snarled as though the wind was a person. "I'll just show you."

He pulled out a cigar lighter, his numbed hands fumbling. He grinned as it flamed until he saw the modernistic chromium design. Teddy had given that to him; Teddy LaClede. Old Tony Zam-

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belli's moll. Tony was doing time. He was dumb. Smart guys could beat the rap. Cleghorn always had; and he would on this business. He'd have to talk to Teddy; maybe he'd tell her how the cigar lighter she'd given him touched off powder that would blow him into a fortune.

But he could have plenty of janes. All kinds. With money you could get 'em. Gormley's wife—not bad, according to a snapshot picture; not bad.

The ragged fuse end hissed suddenly, like a disturbed viper. It spit out the flame on the cigar lighter. Sparks vomited. He lit the second, hurriedly. But methodically. Sure shot; two fuses.

He started climbing along the slope. Swell show. He had a ringside seat. And he held the ticket that would draw the prize. He stopped, looking down to the cabin. He had thought of everything. No! He hadn't!

Stampede clutched him. His good luck was inside that cabin. Three socks of pure gold nuggets, hidden in his bunk. Three heavy sockfuls. Stuff he had picked out of the vein with his own bleeding fingers. Raw gold. Dollars and dollars of it! His good luck!

He started, running lightly. He'd dive inside, and out again, before things happened. What if he did wake up those two sleepers? They'd not have time to get fully awake and get clear.

That was beautiful stuff he had hidden in those socks. Beautiful. When the snow hit it would scatter that lucky stuff a half mile over the mountain side. He dripped cold sweat.

It would be bad luck to lose that first gold; bad.

He floundered into a snow water bog. It was cold, like the inside of a water-filled grave. He scrambled, ran on, raked his knee on a boulder, reached the cabin door, still on tiptoes. He opened it, carefully. He stepped inside.

Giant, invisible force reached inside his lungs, down into his very core, shaking his fiber. Then man-thunder boomed and bellowed.

Above the blasting sound that plunged down the mountain side was the whisper of a billion snow particles slipping against billions of other particles, as the white slab sheared and slid. The vast silky voice of the snow giant.

Old Bowden bounced out of his bunk, to his feet, lurched toward the door, hardly awake, but acting instinctively. He had heard that great, whispering voice before. He got in Cleghorn's way. They tangled a moment.

"Get the hell out of my way," bawled Cleghorn, shoving him.

"Outside," wailed Bowden. "She's runnin'."

Gormley lunged and fought as he went past Cleghorn, and then reached the door.

Cleghorn heard. That tremendous whispering voice. It touched him with madness, and he pawed in frenzy. The blankets he touched were strangely warm. Suddenly he remembered. This was the bunk Gormley had been sleeping in. His old bunk.

HE spun, dived, his hands reaching for the heavy gold where it had been hidden in the new bed. Fleetingly came the thought that he would have to use his gun now; and toss bodies into the snow. He could make it look okay; any smart guy could. He'd catch 'em while they watched that slide. He had the only guns in camp.

He pivoted, tucking three socks, heavy with nuggets, under his arm. He saw the faint light of the night outside and dived toward it.

Glass shattered as Cleghorn's reaching fists smashed into the barn-sash window. Washing in came the terrible voice of the slide, monstrous, now, and soul-shredding. Crazily Cleghorn smashed and tore at iron bars across the window.

At his finger-tips was all outdoors and he fought insanely to reach it. Reason fled and he wrenched at the unyielding steel.

A runner of mixed snow and rocks smashed into the side of the cabin, and Cleghorn suddenly screamed.

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"Lord," said Gormley from up on the solid, safe ledges of black granite. "What a show! What a show!"

"What went haywire with Cleghorn, you reckon?" asked Bowden after a moment. "He was flounderin' around in the cabin there fit to bust an' he ain't some out yet. Maybe he got so scared he hid under the blankets in his bunk. 'Feered of that slide, he was."

For seconds they both were wordless, looking again and again, awed, wondering.

"Let's see about Cleghorn," said Bowden, and they went down to the cabin.

Gormley struck a match as they opened the cabin door, and lit the bracket lamp. He heard the queer, caught breath of old man Bowden, and Gormley turned.

Cleghorn's clawed hand was hooked over heavy steel that guarded the window. His other hand clutched one heavy sock while two others spilled dullish metallic bits of ore over worn planks of the floor. Bowden touched Cleghorn's lifeless wrist.

"Scared to death," he said. "Got stampeded. Thought the slide would hit the cabin. Got muddled in the dark, an' tried to get out that window thinkin' it was the open door he saw. High altitude did the rest; it does things to human hearts in a good many ways."

"Look at this!" said Gormley, abruptly stooping. He held up the sock full of rough gold. Old man Bowden stared.

"That's ore from the lost lode," blurted Bowden. His tongue licked lips that suddenly were dry. "That's the identical mineral I was findin' years back, when she faulted an' I lost 'er. An' he found where she outcropped. Kept it to himself, he did."

"Listen to me," Gormley cried, clutching at Bowden's shoulders. "There were rocks falling out of the air when we jumped out of the cabin. That slide couldn't cause that. Bowden, he dynamited the dike, expecting to kill us because—"

"Wait," said old man Bowden. "Wait until mornin'. Don't accuse nobody until you're sartin."

In the thin, cold dawn they left Cleghorn wrapped in his blankets and climbed.

"Broken powder cases," Bowden remarked as they came to where a wedge had been blown out of the middle of the dike. "He didn't know enough about this kind of powder to tamp it down tight. He was just that ignorant, Cleghorn was."

"Daylight's coming," said Gormley. "Let's find where he's been digging."

THEY tumbled down slope, and to the snow trench where Cleghorn had been hacking away at rock and ice and old snow.

"Gimme that pick," breathed Gormley.

"Clear out, an' let me have a try," directed Bowden.

The fiery lure of big treasure caught them. They scratched and dug at mixed snow and broken rock until they had to stop, panting. Little chunks of ore gritted under their feet where they had uncovered the vein Cleghorn had hidden under old snow.

"It's the lode," breathed old Bowden. "Apex of that lost ore body. Been here, under this bank of snow that don't melt out ever. Cleghorn had beginner's luck."

"Guess it's plain now what was crosswise in Cleghorn," remarked Gormley. "This outcrop is about on the line between your claim and the one I staked next to it; about half and half. Cleghorn was dead set to have it all for himself."

"He could have," said old man Bowden, his little eyes squinting. "Your upper boundary an' mine dips here; down slope. This apexes square inside the claim Cleghorn staked above us. Under the apex law, it gives the whole lode to anyone ownin' the claim on which it outcrops, at its highest point. Any court in the country'd given him the whole shootin'-match if he'd went to law. Right of discovery."

"I'm going for an ax," declared Gormley as he started down slope. "We can reface those posts and put our names on 'em. Cleghorn never recorded this claim; but we will."

THE END

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The Men Who Make The Argosy

The Man Who Wrote "Lysander of Chios"

I WAS born, as the phrase goes, on the bleak shores of New England, and in the vicinity of Boston. However, I spent comparatively little time in that city, for my family's affairs took us frequently to Europe and to other American cities. At an early age my brother and I were taught to take care of ourselves in the woods, and we enjoyed many summers of camping, canoeing and sailing—not in the "social" manner, however.

Having been brought up to speak French, for several years my brother and I were thrown largely on our own resources because of our comparative unfamiliarity with English; and that fact, plus the family's frequent moves, prevented the close friendships common to the ordinary young boy. Hence, since I was by nature so inclined, I became somewhat bookish. I was drawn to languages as easily as a cat to a fish cart.

A year at a military school did me worlds of good, forcing me to get along with American boys my own age. Then came the War, as wars will; and after having been thrown out of every recruiting station within a hundred miles, I at last managed to get overseas with the Red Cross. Once there, I promptly transferred to the French Artillery, and when the United States came in I was offered a commission in the American Army. Here a knowledge of French stood me in good stead, and during the balance of the war I played the fascinating rôle of liaison officer.

Perhaps the hardest thing I ever did was to come back from overseas and spend a year at a preparatory school before entering college. At Harvard I had such an extremely pleasant time that I got through with little to boast about in a scholastic way. I did, however, row on the varsity light weight crew, I was art editor of *The Lampoon* for a year, and I learned something about polo.

After these bright college years were over, I spent a good deal of time in eastern Europe, building up an import trade in works of art. A caravan trip into the deep Sahara preceded my return home and the assumption of the responsibilities of a breadwinner.

I began to write in 1928, and I have been fortunate far beyond my deserts. I always find detective stories the hardest to write; historical novels the most fascinating. I now live in Maryland; and with ducks to shoot and horses to ride I find very little to complain of.

F. V. W. Mason.

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Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

CURIOUS, the way in which an author gets his ideas for stories.

J. Allan Dunn, author of "Goblin Trail" in this issue of ARGOSY, developed his tale out of the following news item:

Out of Anchorage, Alaska, last January, came the story of the "Wild Man of Nashagak," a vague terror who guarded a vast territory in the isolated district north of Bristol Bay. The story was brought back to civilization by a prospector who had returned from a season of gold hunting in this region, which on the maps is but an unexplored white patch. Trappers and prospectors had drawn a voluntary boundary to the terror's domain, and beyond that line they dared not go.

The wild man, probably crazed by loneliness, was several times reported seen, and was blamed for the mysterious disappearances of three or four men who ventured into the province.

LATE in June ARGOSY begins to print four serials in every issue, Mr. Cleland:

Northfield, Minn.

All my friends who are ARGOSY readers prefer more serials than the present two; and these acquaintances are spread all over the country—correspondents in New York, Pennsylvania, California, and Kansas. But perhaps that is because most of us first started reading ARGOSY when it ran four and five serials a week. It occurs to me also that the present policy may be forcing out some of the splendid authors who write nothing but serials.

Still ARGOSY always gives as much for a dime as any other magazine on the market, and I shall probably continue to buy it as I have in the past.

COURTNEY CLELAND.

A TOAST in *Frijole's* best prune juice:

New York City.

Like many ARGOSY fans of long standing, I've always resented strongly the invasion of the novelettes which crowd out my pet serials. ARGOSY used to mean book-length novels to me. Any shorter stories it contained weren't worth much consideration.

I'm still an advocate of the old style ARGOSY with the serial as king. Yet to show how funny

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.

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we humans are, I nominate as the best story (or stories) so far this year not a serial, but a novelette. This novelette being any of those in which there appears W. C. Tuttle's nosey *Henry;* ably abetted by *Oscar Johnson* of the musical soul; by the *Judge,* of enviable liquor capacity; by *Oscar's* friend and benefactor, the prune juice wizard *Mr. Frijole Bill;* by *Slim,* the sardonic one —or any of the other interesting people who live and laugh in Wild Horse Valley.

It's a tough old world, and a man gets few chances to enjoy life, these depressing days in which a smile is at a premium and a laugh something to cause amazement. Dull days and sour faces sink the spirit of the most optimistic. A tonic is needed to snap us out of the dumps and make us see tomorrow as a possible improvement on today. What better medicine than a good hearty laugh?

Any man who can create such priceless lunatics as Tuttle's characters deserves our sincerest gratitude. I've just finished the latest of *Henry's* adventures, "The Sherlock of Sageland," and as with all previous stories in this series I cackled all through the tale and ended up with peace in my soul and a big grin on my pan. Whatever the verdict as to best yarns, I'd like to join with all Tuttle fans and drink a toast (in *Frijole Bill's* best prune juice) to more and longer laughs.

EDWARD A. SANDS.

HE saves the installments and reads them all together:

Houston, Texas.

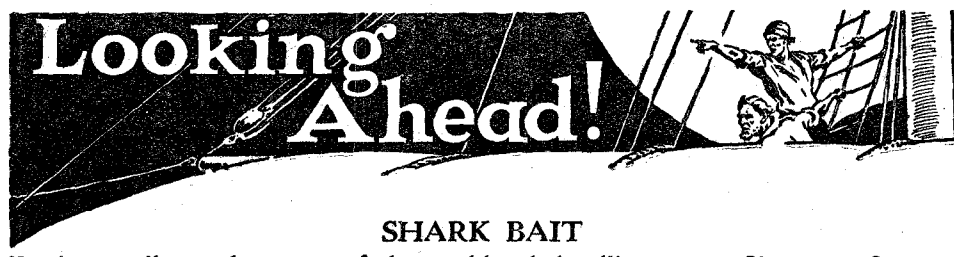
I had been so busy at the office working twelve to fourteen hours every day, and four Sundays in a row, that I had about ten ARGOSYS that I hadn't had time to glance at. When I was ordered to bed with flu, and when the fever left me—oh, boy! Did I make up for lost time!

I have told you my system of reading. The shorts and complete novelettes first, and then, having placed the serial installments in rotation, I start one serial and complete it before starting another. That way I get *all* the good, without forgetting any of the story between parts.

I have about forty copies on hand, so now that our annual rush of business at the office is over for another year (I work in the County Auto Registration Department), I will soon need some new issues. I have been reading the ARGOSY only since Dec., 1897!

Concerning Roscoe's "War Declared!" you are darn right war is a racket! I have heard lots of ex-doughboys say the same thing, and that they will never volunteer to go over to another country to fight, though they would defend our homes with their last drop of blood.

Getting tired, so I'll sign off. Tell Tuttle to keep *Henry* and the *Judge* busy. *Adios* for another six months! R. A. HOWARD.



SHARK BAIT

Further perilous adventures of that red-headed rolling stone, *Singapore Sammy,* the boy who solved the mystery of "The Monster of the Lagoon" in ARGOSY last February.—This time it's treasure, in a three-part serial by

GEORGE F. WORTS

BRAIN AND BRAWN

Tense and unusual is this tale of a Yankee's fight to sink a Latin-American oil well. A vivid novelette by

TOM CURRY

"STAND BY TO CRASH!"

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COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JUNE 22nd

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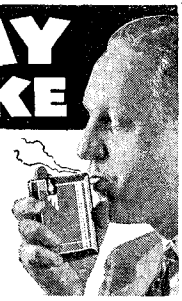

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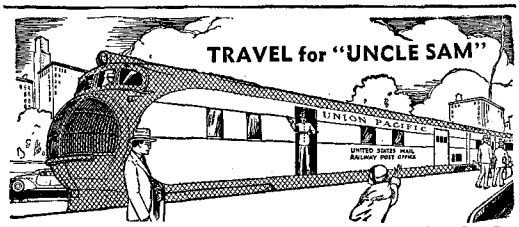

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Have tried the Vacu-matic and it sure is fine. Better pick-up with a 30% gas saving.—John C. Martin, Pa.

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I am amazed at Vacu-matic performance. It's giving me 5 more miles per gallon. - Walter Zielinski, Ill.

V-8 FORD
I installed both Vacu-matics and they work excellent. On my own V8 Ford I notice wonderful performance in pickup, get-away and gas saving. — Burt Burnett, Mich.

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Everything you claim about Vacu matic is true. I now get 20 miles to the gallon. Before I was only averaging 15½ miles. — C. Constantino, Fla.

FRANKLIN
With Vacu-matic I have increased my mileage from 10.1 to 14.2 miles per gallon. I figure I save over $75.00 a year in gasoline. R. K. Radtke. Wis.

SAVES $180 A YEAR
On my Plymouth 6 I obtained an average of 22 miles per gal lon, an increase of 7 miles. This means a saving of $15 a month or $180 a year. F S. Peck, Calif.

CHEVROLET
Please send me a Vacu-matic for a Mo del A. The mileage on my 1933 Chevrolet jumped from 18 to 22 miles per gal. with Vacu-matic. — Paul P. Haas, Mass.

ALL WELL PLEASED
Enclosed find order for 12 more. Everyone I have sold is giving from 4 to 6 more miles per gallon. I have 3 more orders for V8 Ford. Every body is well pleased.—J. O. Carll, Texas.

MODEL A FORD
Have been using the Vacu-matic for a month. I used to get 20 to 22 miles per gal. Now I get 30 to 33 miles. It is amazing the difference it makes.—James W. Barr, Canada.

NASH
On my Advanced 6 Nash gained 17½% in mileage. The car will idle down to 3 miles an hour and then take gas without a complaint. — J. Showalter, Mo.

DODGE
Just completed 2310 miles on 92 gallons in my 1933 Dodge 6. This figures 25 miles while before I averaged only 20 miles per gal. on trips. — Al Fruzyna, Calif.

OLDSMOBILE
I am well pleased with Vacu-matic on our Oldsmobile. A test proved it to give 18 miles per gal. Before we considered 13 good. — Arthur Williams, N. Y.

Above are just a few of the many unsolicited letters received from Vacu-matic users.

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AT LAST! Automotive engineers have smashed down the barriers to perfected combustion! The new VACU-MATIC solves the secret of greater power! With almost magical action, this amazing invention instantly puts new life and pep in any motor. It adds mileage to every gallon of gasoline . . . produces split-second pick-up, sensitive accelerator response, greater speed and smoother running

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